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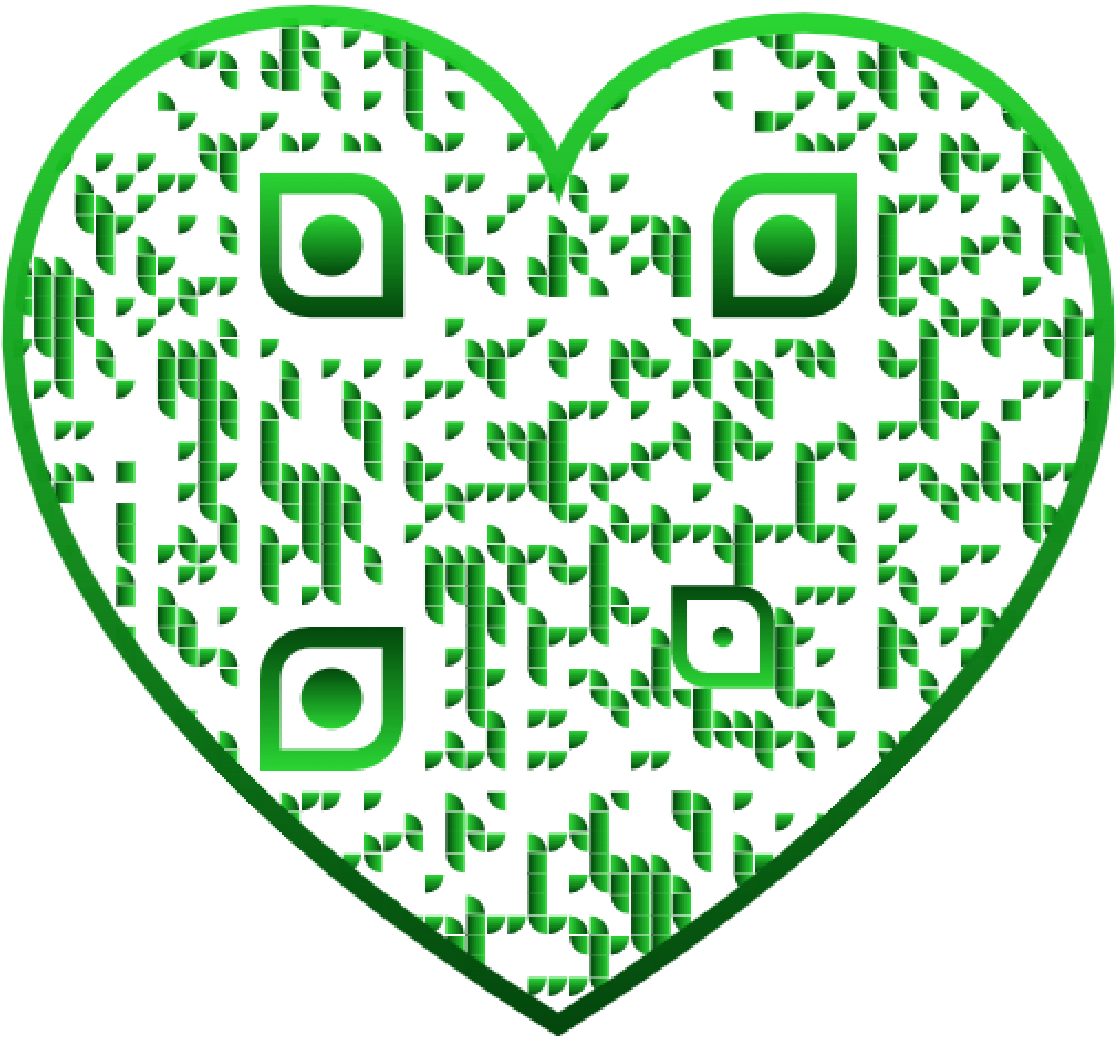

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COMMENT

THE SHAKE-UP AT JLR HAS STARTED WITH A BANG

The sudden departure of JLR design bigwig Gerry McGovern this month has sent shock waves through the car industry. Whether or not it should have come as a surprise is another matter.

Having worked at the firm since 2004 and as chief creative officer since 2020, McGovern has shaped huge commercial successes, most notably the Evoque, Defender and Range Rover. He is also the man behind the most talked-about car in years: the Jaguar Type 00, which has yet to come to fruition.

But he was also considered by many to have got too big for his boots, exerting control well beyond the scope of most people in such a position – and with the tide dramatically turning at JLR in recent times, it seemed inevitable the love affair would end one way or another.

The death in 2024 of Ratan Tata, leader of JLR owner Tata Group and with whom McGovern had close ties, and the very recent arrival of financially minded PB Balaji – shipped in directly from Tata HQ – as JLR's CEO were two major clues that this was coming.

McGovern's persona kept JLR in the public eye despite it having no new products to launch in recent years. Balaji's arrival, and this early, huge shake-up, suggests that actions at the firm will soon speak louder than words once more.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Mad Manthey vs the clock
How much faster does £100,000 of Manthey specialist kit make the amateur track-day driver? Richard Lane finds out in its 911 GT3 RS.

Game for a laugh
Audi owners will soon be able to pair controllers and fire up some of their favourite games on their infotainment systems. We try it.

Forgotten concept cars
We look back at 44 unusual concepts that risk being forgotten as time passes. How many of them will you know?

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NEWS

GOT A STORY Email our news editor
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ESPRIT SERIES 1 REBORN WITH V8 FOR NEW ERA

UK firm Encor to convert 50 examples of legendary Lotus

The Lotus Esprit Series 1 has been reimagined with a redesigned carbonfibre body and a new V8 powertrain by a start-up consisting of former Hethel staff, almost 40 years after the sports car went off sale.

The new Series 1 has been created by Chelmsford-based Encor, which plans to make 50 examples priced from around £430,000.

Chief engineer Will Ives said the brief was to "refine" the classic analogue driving experience that made the Series 1 Esprit so popular in the 1970s and then pair it with modern technology to make it more usable today. He added that the car had been "improved in almost every way".

According to Ives, the team "wanted to respect the original but not be handcuffed by it", admitting that "while we love the car, there was just so much opportunity to improve it".

Although the new Encor Series 1 is a reimagining of the first Esprit, its base is actually the Series 4 V8 – the final version of the model, from 1994. This was chosen because it used a more advanced version of the chassis with a stronger structure.

Despite that, chief designer Dan Durrant – who was responsible for the exterior design of the Lotus Emira – said the team still had a "responsibility" to be as faithful to the original as they could.

And while Encor hasn't worked with Lotus on its Series 1, co-founder and commercial director Simon Lane hoped "they see it as kind of complementing what they're doing".

POWERTRAIN

The biggest change from the Esprit Series 1 is the powertrain. Encor said the original Type 907 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine lacked the characteristics and emotion needed for such a car in the modern era. Instead, the company decided to give it the power "it should have had" by opting for the Type 918 3.5-litre, twin-turbocharged, flat-plane V8 from the Esprit Series 4.

The engine has been rebuilt using new pistons, turbochargers and injectors. Power is boosted by 50bhp to 400bhp at 6200rpm and torque by 60lb ft to 350lb ft at 5000rpm, which means Encor's Series 1 puts out 240bhp and 210lb ft more than the original Esprit.

Weighing just 1200kg wet, this gives Encor's model a power-to-weight ratio of 333bhp per tonne – the same as the 2018 Aston Martin Vantage.

Encor has also paired the V8 with a modern electronic throttle body control and a new ECU, which Ives said "gives us much more precise control and, most importantly, drivability".

The five-speed manual gearbox has been reworked too. Ives said "it was always considered a limitation of the [original] car, but it's pretty much impossible to package anything else within the space", so the team had to find a way to "effectively recreate a new transmission out of the casings of the old".

> **"We wanted to respect the original but not be handcuffed by it"**

Keeping "just a few" pieces of the gearbox's internals, the team created effectively a new unit. They also added a limited-slip differential to improve the drivetrain's strength.

"We're addressing that weakness and that enables us to then take the engine up to a slightly higher output, because we're no longer limited by the original gearbox," said Ives.

The work means the Encor Series 1 can sprint from 0-62mph in 4.0sec – almost half the time taken by the Lotus original – and tops out at 175mph.

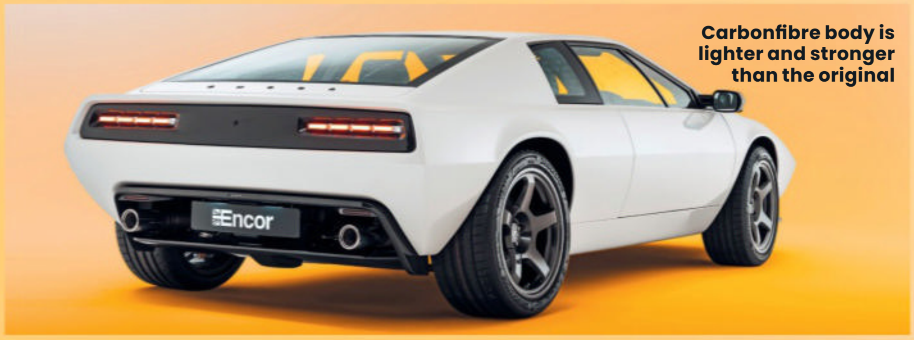
SUSPENSION

Alongside the rebuilt V8, the suspension system, anti-roll bars and electronics are completely new, essentially making the Series 1 a modern car underneath.

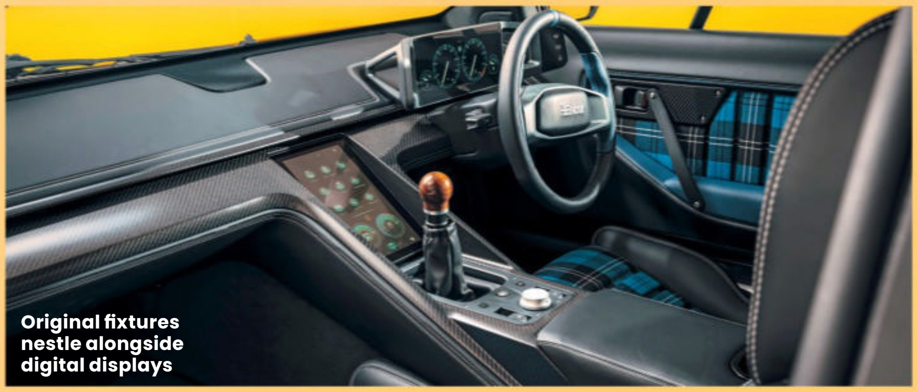
One of the most significant technical changes is the switch from a fly-off handbrake to an electronic one. This enabled Encor to improve the car's packaging, which includes

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES

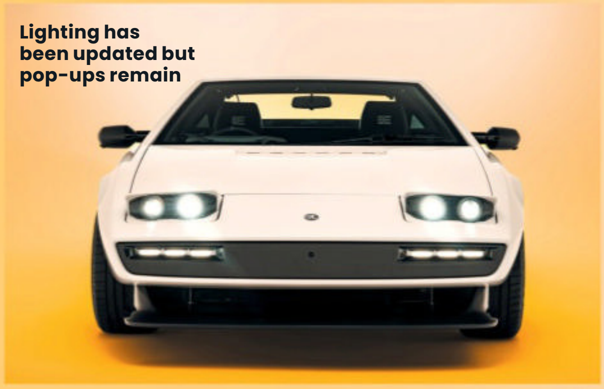
V8 is from '90s Esprit Series 4, reworked to put out 400bhp



Carbonfibre body is lighter and stronger than the original



Original fixtures nestle alongside digital displays



Lighting has been updated but pop-ups remain

a more reinforced bulkhead, a lower weight, thanks to the loss of mechanical parts, and larger rear brakes.

"We keep everything that's good," said Ives. "[The originals] are frankly fantastic cars. They were always seen as possessing one of the best power steering [systems] of any car ever, even today. So we keep all of that and then can kind of build on that.

"Now, we're slightly lighter and slightly more powerful. That's the benefit of another 20 years of engineering and development [since the Series 4 was retired]."

DESIGN

While Encor's sports car looks almost identical to the original Series 1 (indeed, it shares the same dimensions), it has an entirely new body. The Series 4 donor car's glassfibre tub is removed and in its place a bespoke carbonfibre body is fitted that has been created to the exact specification of the Series 1.

Ives said the reason for the complete new bodyshell is to ensure the strongest chassis possible while also saving weight. "We decided to tackle the entire structure," he said. "Our shell is about half the weight of the original and of course incredibly stiff."

The look is also a "refined" version of the original but houses some modern touches and bespoke elements.

For example, the retro-futuristic daytime-running lights at the front and rear are the biggest indication of that, along with the LED headlights that replace the original bulbs in the pop-up units. For the latter, the use of smaller, modern lights also means a lower pop-up angle is needed, which in turn aids aerodynamics.

The changes are more extensive than they might initially appear, said Durrant, pointing to the absence of the black line that ran along the length of the original Esprit's body.

"That was actually a really smart engineering feature at the time," he said, "because they made a giant [tub] for the top, a giant [tub] for the bottom and glued it in the middle. They had a flange where they glued it. They had to get rid of it, so they styled it in and they painted it black."

Encor's interior is a mix of old and new, with a 10.1in horizontal infotainment screen and a single-piece cluster with an integrated 10.25in driver's display flanked by a wooden gear selector, 1970s-style rear-view mirror and the original indicator stalks.

The team also tackled the car's crash-worthiness by fitting an integrated carbonfibre cage because, said Lane, "the original Esprit didn't actually have any rollover protection, so you really didn't want to roll it".

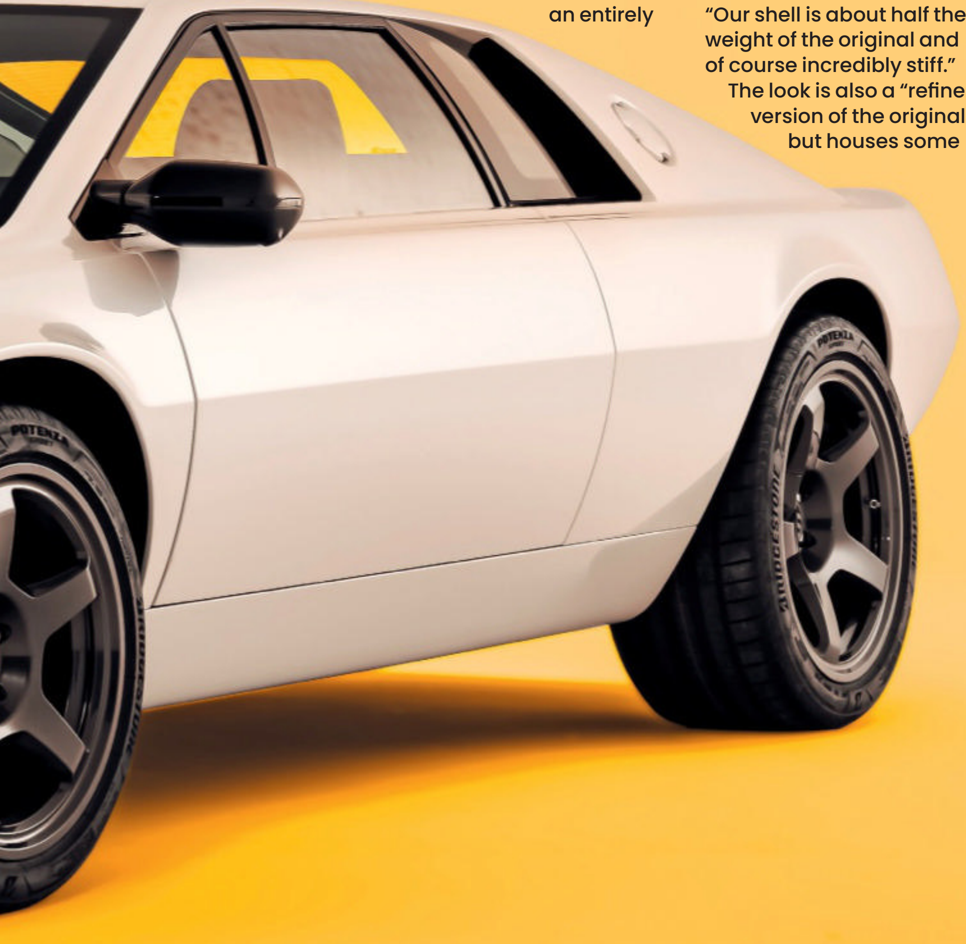
"We've been able to take a complete, holistic look at it and improve it," added Ives.

Durrant admitted that the team felt "a really, very strong sense of responsibility on a car that's so well loved, so iconic" during the project, compelling them "to treat it with absolute respect".

Encor plans to create just 50 conversions, priced at £430,000, not including the Series 4 V8 donor car.

Lotus made around 800 original Esprit Series 1s.

WILL RIMELL

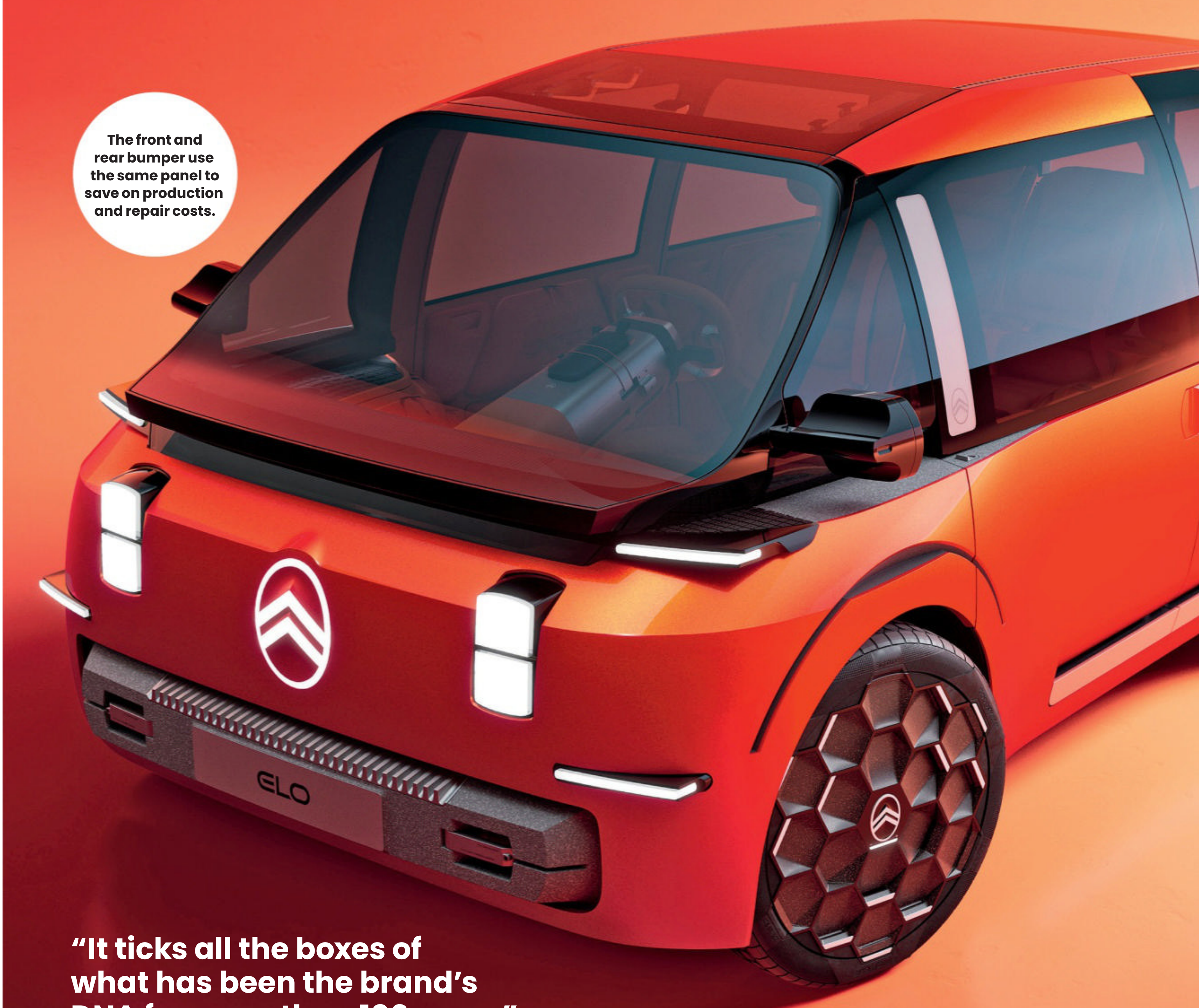


	ENCOR SERIES 1 	LOTUS ESPRIT SERIES 1
Length/width/height	4190/1860/1110mm	4190/1860/1110mm
Kerb weight	1200kg	1006kg
Engine	Lotus Type 918, V8, 3.5 litres, twin-turbo	Lotus Type 907, 4 cyls in line, 2.0 litres, 16v
Power	400bhp at 6200rpm	160bhp at 6200rpm
Torque	350lb ft at 5000rpm	140lb ft at 4900rpm
0-62mph	4.0sec	7.8sec
Top speed	175mph	125mph
Power to weight	333bhp per tonne	159bhp per tonne

OFFICIAL PICTURES

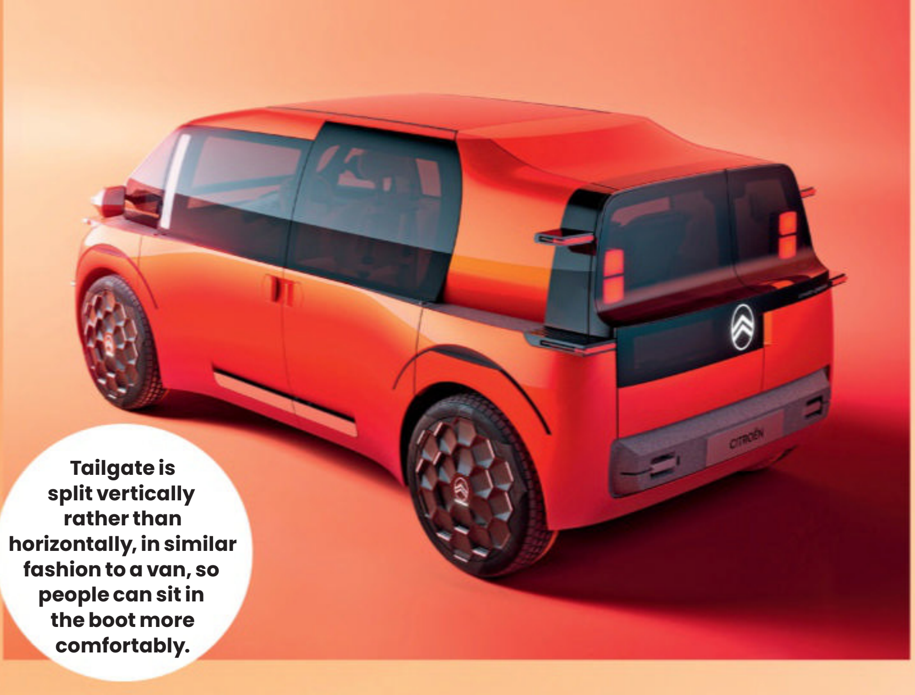
CITROEN HINTS AT MPV FUTURE WITH SIX-SEAT EV

New 4.1m-long concept is a versatile and bold vision of the firm's intent



The front and rear bumper use the same panel to save on production and repair costs.

> "It ticks all the boxes of what has been the brand's DNA for more than 100 years"



Tailgate is split vertically rather than horizontally, in similar fashion to a van, so people can sit in the boot more comfortably.

Citroën has previewed a potential return to making MPVs with the dramatic new ELO concept – a tiny six-seater described by the brand as a "house on wheels".

It's an electric car that measures just 4.1m long yet hosts a novel three-by-three interior configuration with a McLaren F1-style central driving position.

The driver's seat features its own suspension, in the form of foam blocks inside its frame, and comes with a desk attachment for working on the go.

The front passenger chairs, meanwhile, can be removed and stowed inside the rear row when they aren't needed.

The rear seats were inspired by the pop-out camping furniture stocked by French sporting goods retailer Decathlon, with which Citroën collaborated to design the ELO. Although the row of seats itself is fixed, the bases can be removed and feature fold-out legs for use outside the car.

The seatbacks can be folded flat too, providing a floor for a pair of single mattresses suspended from the ELO's ceiling. The same hooks that support these mattresses can also be used to fit a projector screen for watching films while inside the car.

Citroën said its intention is for the ELO to function as a "base camp". As such, plug sockets and an air pump are integrated into the flanks of the floor, accessible while the sliding doors are open, and an awning can be mounted across these doors to provide shade.

The rear section of the ELO's roof pops up for 'when the sun is shining in the sky and there ain't a cloud in sight'. Meanwhile, the extrusions on the front and rear running lights are topped with a grid-like anti-slip surface, enabling them to be used as trays for dinner plates.

The same texture is used on the top of the dashboard, so phones can be placed vertically next to the driver while they are connected to the ELO's wide head-up display screen.

But Citroën contends that there is no traditional 'dashboard' as such. The driver is instead cocooned by the fascia into their own compartment, with the front passengers offset slightly behind this panel.

Physical buttons have been kept to a minimum. The electric motor starter and hazard light switch are mounted on the steering column, while secondary functions are controlled using a pair of video game-style joysticks that are mounted on the steering wheel.

According to Citroën, providing a large glasshouse – to let lots of natural light into the interior – was a priority for the ELO, manifesting in a bubble-like front screen and a low shoulder line.

Citroën wouldn't comment on the production potential of the ELO, as parent firm Stellantis has yet to confirm whether its current or future electric car platforms could support the six-seat layout.

It does, however, build on the radical thinking introduced with the Oli concept in 2022 and could have significant ramifications for Citroën's sibling brands. Fiat used three-by-three seating in the 1998 Multipla and a production version of the ELO could open the door for a retro revival of that cult-classic family hauler.

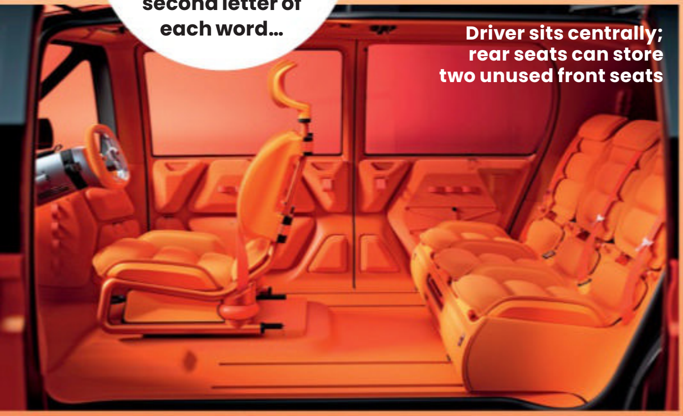
Citroën CEO Xavier Chardon said the concept "conveys our vision of what Citroën should be", with the brand having suffered something of an identity crisis in recent years.

Chardon previously admitted to Autocar that there is confusion around the brand's positioning, and the ELO appears to be intended to answer many of these questions.

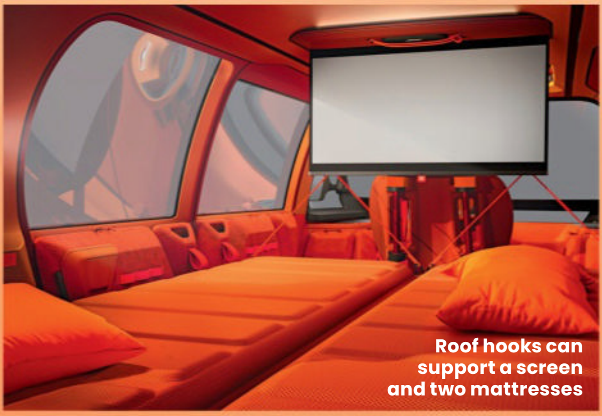
"It ticks all the boxes of what has been the brand's DNA for more than 100 years and what I want to nurture in the coming years: creative, bold, accessible, responsible, ingenious and dedicated to wellbeing," said Chardon.

CHARLIE MARTIN

The name ELO is an acronym describing the car's purposes: rest, play and work. Yeah, the second letter of each word…



Driver sits centrally; rear seats can store two unused front seats



Roof hooks can support a screen and two mattresses

CITROEN'S MOST MEMORABLE CONCEPTS

KARIN

This 1980 vision of a 'dream car' had a curious prismatic design and the same central driving position as the ELO. Citroën at its most bonkers.

XANAE

This 1994 precursor to the Xsara Picasso had a curious lifted-saloon body and was meant to feel significantly roomier than the Xantia on which it was based, despite being a smaller car.

REVOLTE

The last attempt at a retro-futuristic 2CV had PHEV power and in 2009 was mooted to form part of the then burgeoning DS range. If only they had built it.

OLI

Stripped-back 2022 crossover went big on sustainability and affordability, using the same windows and bumpers at its front and rear ends. It also previewed the current iteration of Citroën design.

NEXT PEUGEOT 208 HOT HATCH TO TAP 205 GTi SPIRIT

Firm will make greater use of GTi branding – but on electric models only

Peugeot is set to channel the spirit of the legendary 205 GTi hot hatch with the range-topping performance version of the next 208.

The French manufacturer has already revived the GTi performance sub-brand for a hot new version of its e-208 electric supermini – and now CEO Alain Favey has told Autocar that it will add more GTi models as it moves to put "great driving sensations" at the core of its brand positioning, which is likely to apply to the next iteration of the 208 hatch, due in 2028.

The e-208 GTi is the latest entrant into the growing field of electric hot hatchbacks and will take on the Alpine A290, Cupra Born VZ and incoming Volkswagen ID Polo GTI with 278bhp, a 5.7sec 0-62mph time and a mechanical limited-slip differential.

It is the first GTi hot hatch that Peugeot has launched since the previous-generation 308 range-topper arrived in 2015.

Favey said: "We would not do it if we didn't think that we want the GTi badge to continue existing in future. So definitely we will make sure that there is a future for GTi which goes beyond just that one."

Favey stopped short of giving any details about the form that these future hot hatchbacks will take but said: "The important thing is to make sure that wherever there is a GTi badge, you get an experience that is one of a kind and absolutely the top in the category."

He added that GTi is an important element of Peugeot's heritage and is being resurrected as part of a drive to "position the brand, to say very clearly that Peugeot stands for great driving sensations. That's part of what we are."

Peugeot's desire to emphasise its heritage is evident in the various references made to the hugely popular 205 in the new Polygon concept, which previews the next 208.

A performance version – which Favey suggests is likely – would no doubt double down on that retro appeal by reinterpreting some of the 205 GTi's defining cues, including pepperpot wheels, red pinstriping and prominent GTi badges.

The next generation of the larger 308, due in around 2028, would also seem a likely candidate for a GTi version, given that model name has recent performance heritage to leverage. That would enable Peugeot once again to offer a rival to the likes of the VW Golf GTI and Cupra Leon.

However the GTi range is expanded, Favey said the badge will not be used again for a petrol hot hatch, because CO_2 emissions

FRANCE'S FEARSOME HOT HATCH RIVALRY IS BACK

Peugeot revealed the e-208 GTi in June at the Le Mans 24 Hours and will begin taking orders at the 2026 race before starting deliveries by the year's end.

So there will be almost 18 months between the unveiling and customer deliveries – a lengthy lead time that, said Favey, is testament to Peugeot's lofty ambitions for the GTi.

"That's just the time it takes to get the car ready," he said. "We want the car to be really top in its category and really a credible hot hatch, and that's as long as it takes."

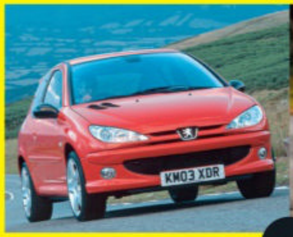
Acknowledging Alpine's Renault 5-based A290 as the primary benchmark for Peugeot's engineers, Favey said the e-208 GTi "will definitely be better" than its similarly conceived compatriot – "at least, that's what we hope to be".

"No, but seriously, one of our reference points is to be better than this car, and we think we will be," he added, calling to mind the fierce historic hot hatch rivalry between the two firms, with the original 205 GTi serving as the closest rival for the Renault 5 GT Turbo and later the two going toe to toe with the 206 GTi and Clio RS 172.

PEUGEOT E-208 GTi

VS

ALPINE A290



PEUGEOT 206 GTi

VS

RENAULT CLIO RS

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Next-generation e-208 GTi is likely to mix retro and modern

penalties in Peugeot's home market would make it too expensive to be viable.

He said: "France is a big market for us and unfortunately the rules are such that there are extremely heavy CO_2 penalties – up to €70,000 [£61,400] – so it would make it just impossible to buy.

"So we would have a nice car everybody would love, but it would be just impossible to own – and that would make it completely impossible. And if we don't have the French market, it's difficult for us to justify developing a car like that."

FELIX PAGE

Peugeot 205 GTi remains a key reference point

Previous 308 was last Peugeot to wear GTi badge, axed in 2019

Peugeot pulled the plug on its tiny 108 in 2020

EU'S NEW E-CAR CATEGORY COULD SPARK 108 REVIVAL

PEUGEOT COULD LAUNCH a new city car in the vein of the old 108 if the EU's new 'E-car' category is successful in making such models viable again.

The firm has previously been cool on the prospect of reviving its city car, which was axed in 2020 due to razor-thin margins. But now CEO Alain Favey has told Autocar that a return to the A-segment could be on the cards.

"We've sold more than a million cars in the A-segment in the not so distant past," he said. "So definitely if there is this new category that allows us to produce smaller cars at a profit, then obviously there will be a space for Peugeot in that area, as there was in the past."

Favey was referring to the E-car category planned by European law makers to enable the region's car companies to produce smaller and more affordable models.

Details have yet to be finalised, but the new framework would look to alleviate some of the costs of small car production by reducing the amount of legislation and mandatory technologies for such cars.

But Favey emphasised that Peugeot wouldn't consider re-entering the A-segment unless there's a framework in place that allows it to make money.

Favey continued: "As long as there isn't, I would confirm what my predecessor [Linda Jackson] said, which is: 'No, there is no space for an A-segment car today, as basically everybody is exiting that segment for the same reason, which is that there is no way to make such a car – at such a low price – profitable, as long as you have to put so much equipment on it.'"

PATH OPEN TO A FUTURE 508 ESTATE

Peugeot is considering a successor to the 508 SW estate as it looks to expand into segments beyond its current hatchback and crossover offerings.

Asked about the prospect of an eventual replacement for the firm's Skoda Superb rival, Favey said: "Why not? We had to stop the 508 because, as much as I dislike it, there was not enough demand to justify it remaining in the market. Now we are exploring what's next after the SUVs and maybe there will be something that will make sense, even in that part of the market, later on."

The all-new GLB

OFFICIAL PICTURES

NEW MULTI-FUEL MERC GLB ON SALE EARLY 2026

Roomier seven-seater offers electric or hybrid power from roughly £41k

Mercedes has revealed the new, second-generation GLB as the chunky, seven-seat SUV sibling to the CLA.

Familiar on the surface but all new underneath, the GLB is the second model to use Mercedes' new MMA architecture for compact cars, which accommodates both pure-electric and hybrid powertrains.

The new GLB is also the largest MMA-based model, with the smaller GLA crossover set to slot in underneath it next year.

Stuttgart's overhauled family crossover will face little in the way of direct rivals, being the only premium offering in this segment that's available with either EV or ICE power and the option of seven seats. However, logical alternatives include the Tesla Model Y, Audi Q4 E-tron and Volkswagen ID 4. Other three-row electric SUVs are either much cheaper, like the Peugeot e-5008, or much pricier and larger, like the Volvo EX90 and Kia EV9.

The GLB will go on sale in early 2026 and command a premium of around £2000 over the equivalent CLA Shooting Brake – so expect a start price of roughly £41,000 for the combustion car and just under £50,000 for the EV.

DESIGN

The new GLB stays true to its predecessor in adopting a straight-edged, two-box SUV silhouette that nods to the outline of Mercedes' flagship G-Class off-roader – and, as before, the ICE and EV versions broadly share the same design.

The main difference between the two is that the ICE version uses a 'classic' grille with a chrome star pattern, and an illuminated frame as standard, whereas the EV "reinterprets" that traditional look with a distinctive illuminated front panel, hosting 94 individual stars that "welcome and bid farewell to the driver" by lighting up in different patterns.

The three-pointed star also features prominently in the LED lights at each end – with the rears linked by a full-width light bar that also shows animations – and, to cap it off, there are a further 158 stars etched into the sunroof.

Otherwise, the main visual difference compared with the previous car is that the new version is 60mm longer between the wheels. Mercedes said this not only boosts leg space inside but also gives the car an "even more confident" stance – accentuated by the 4x4-style body cladding and visible undertray, which "emphasise the SUV character".

> **"The electric GLB will arrive first, offering a choice of 260bhp or 349bhp"**

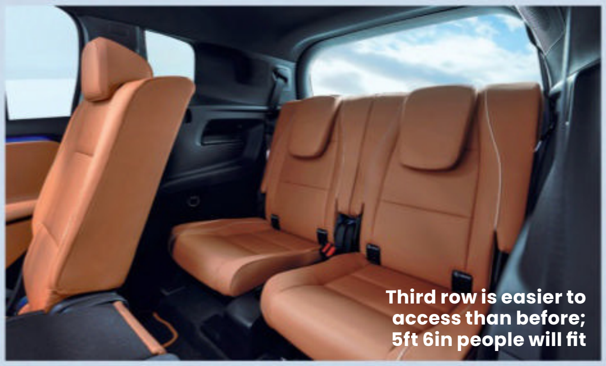
INTERIOR

With the wheelbase extended by 60mm to 2.9m (now just surpassing that of the larger GLC), the new GLB offers more space in the second and optional third row than its predecessor. The rearmost two seats are also capable of "comfortably" accommodating passengers up to 5ft 6in tall.

Plus, said Mercedes, it's

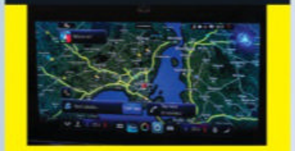
The all new GLB

Rear light bar can show animations; note the LED stars



Third row is easier to access than before; 5ft 6in people will fit

TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVE



TALK CONVERTER
'Hey Mercedes' voice assistant responds to navigation queries using Google data and ChatGPT and Bing for 'knowledge' questions, including such crucial enquiries as: "When does cherry blossom season start in Japan?"

SEE THE STARS
Sky Control can change the panoramic roof's opacity in just 10-20 milliseconds and can be set to fully opaque, transparent or striped.

TUBBY CUBBY
At 127 litres, the GLB EQ's frunk is bigger than the Tesla Model Y's – and large enough for "a crate of drinks, three footballs or a compact tent", said Mercedes.

easier to get back there now, courtesy of larger door openings and more adjustment range in the middle seats.

Head room has increased too – by up to 35mm for the driver, 64mm for the middle passengers and 10mm in the third row.

But the headline feature of the new GLB's cabin is the option of adding the massive Superscreen arrangement from the top-link S-Class, which unites the 10.25in driver display, 14in central touchscreen and 14in passenger infotainment touchscreen within one expansive panel that spans the entire width of the dashboard.

The new suite runs the latest version of Mercedes' MBUX infotainment system, which the firm described as having "supercomputer" levels of functionality. Capable of being kept constantly up to date and receiving new functions over the air, it's powered by a video game graphics engine and – in an industry first – comes equipped with AI-assisted functions from both Microsoft and Google built in.

This newest version of MBUX also introduces an enhanced version of the 'Hey Mercedes' virtual assistant, which uses ChatGPT AI to offer the sort of "multi-turn dialogues one might have with a friend" – with a short-term memory and the ability to use Google Gemini AI to provide in-depth, personalised navigation queries.

But despite the stronger emphasis on touch and voice controls, Mercedes has reintroduced a physical volume control roller and a switch for the adaptive cruise control system "in response to numerous customer requests".

POWERTRAINS

As with the CLA, the electric GLB with EQ Technology will be launched first. There will be a choice between the 260bhp, rear-driven 250 or range-topping dual-motor 350 4Matic with 349bhp.

An 85kWh (usable) battery is capable of delivering up to 392 miles of range in the most efficient variant, making this one of the longest-range electric crossovers of this size.

It can charge at speeds of up to 320kW, so it's also one of the quickest-charging; Mercedes claims it can take on 162 miles of range in as little as 10 minutes.

The GLB follows the CLA in being compatible exclusively with 800V charging hardware as standard. Buyers hoping to use the UK's more common 400V public chargers will need an optional DC converter at a cost of £850. Bi-directional vehicle-to-load (V2L) charging functionality will arrive later as part of an over-the-air update.

Shortly after launch Mercedes will add the entry-level GLB 200, which turns the power of the RWD car down to 221bhp and swaps the battery for a smaller 58kWh unit that will net around 280 miles of range – but full details remain to be confirmed.

ICE power will come later next year in the form of a 1.5-litre mild-hybrid petrol four-pot that will be available in three outputs: sending 134bhp or 161bhp to the front wheels or 188bhp to all four in the range-topping 4Matic.

Having a 1.3kWh battery and a 27bhp electric motor in its automatic gearbox, the hybrid will be capable of driving with its engine off at low speeds for short distances.

Mercedes will confirm full technical specs closer to the launch, but the hybrid is expected to be capable of mid-50s to the gallon, based on the technically identical CLA hybrid (driven, p24).

FELIX PAGE

NEW GLB EQ: THE NUMBERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Price from	£49,000 (est)
Max power	349bhp
Max torque	380lb ft
Quickest 0-62mph	5.5sec
Max range	392 miles
Max charging speed	320kW
Boot space	480 litres
Towing capacity	2000kg

Optional Superscreen integrates three displays in one unit

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE

Post-2020 diesel BMWs can use HVO100 'renewable diesel'

'DROP-IN' FUELS: ARE THEY REALLY A VIABLE QUICK FIX?

WHEN THE DISCUSSION around greenhouse gases from the transport sector really got going years ago, it was often said that the quickest way reduce CO_2 emissions was not to change the powertrain technology but the fuel.

Introducing a new model from scratch takes several years. Then add to that the ongoing debate as to which alternative to the internal combustion engine is best in the long term and the changeover period extends to decades.

Some inroads have been made by blending biofuel with petrol and diesel, but petrol and diesel burned in the UK is still predominantly fossil fuel. Now, though, there is increasing interest in developing fuels for spark-ignition and oil-burner engines that are 100% fossil-free.

Called 'drop-in' fuels, because they can be used without any ill effects or modifications to a car's engine, they are being approved by a large number of major car makers for use in their vehicles. Some manufacturers are selective in which of their cars are compatible and others are approving use on an 'as-of-now' basis for new vehicles.

One of the most interesting fuels is HVO100 (HVO being hydrogenated vegetable oil), also known as renewable diesel and a hydrocarbon fuel similar to conventional fossil diesel in that respect. Biodiesel is a different animal, and although it too is made from renewable materials, it's a product of fatty acid methyl ester (FAME). That makes it less compatible, which is why it's blended in UK fuel in relatively small amounts, generally 7%. Last year, Stellantis fully validated its diesel engine range for use with HVO and said many of its Euro 5 and 6 engines were already compatible.

In October, BMW demonstrated to fleet operators how they could reduce the carbon footprint of their fleets by using carbon-neutral fuels as well as EVs. The message to the operators echoed the point at the start of this story: with 250 million vehicles in Europe, their CO_2 footprint could quickly be improved if the proportion of renewable fuel they burn is increased.

As of January this year, all diesel BMWs produced in Germany are being filled with five to eight litres of HVO100 (depending on the model) before being delivered to dealers. The fuel BMW uses is produced by Finnish manufacturer Neste MY and on a well-to-wheel basis gives a 90% reduction in CO_2 emissions compared with conventional fossil diesel.

Well-to-wheel takes into account greenhouse gas emissions not only from the fuel being burned throughout a vehicle's entire life, but also from the extraction and production of raw materials, as well as fuel refining and logistics (such as transport) of the raw materials.

BMW has approved all of its diesel passenger cars manufactured from March 2020 for use with HVO100. Many other manufacturers have also certified diesels for use with the fuel but, like BMW, that's usually conditional on dates of manufacture.

CREATIVE CHIEF McGOVERN LEAVES JLR AFTER 21 YEARS

Designer's departure comes a week after new CEO arrives from Tata

Influential British car designer Gerry McGovern has parted ways with JLR after 21 years.

Autocar broke the news of his departure at the start of December, just a week after new CEO PB Balaji – formerly the finance boss of JLR parent company Tata Motors – took over from the retiring Adrian Mardell.

Sources at JLR told Autocar and Autocar India the British manufacturer's chief creative officer had his position terminated with immediate effect and was "escorted out of the office".

As Autocar went to press, neither a reason for his departure nor the name of his replacement had been officially confirmed.

A JLR spokesperson declined to comment when approached by Autocar.

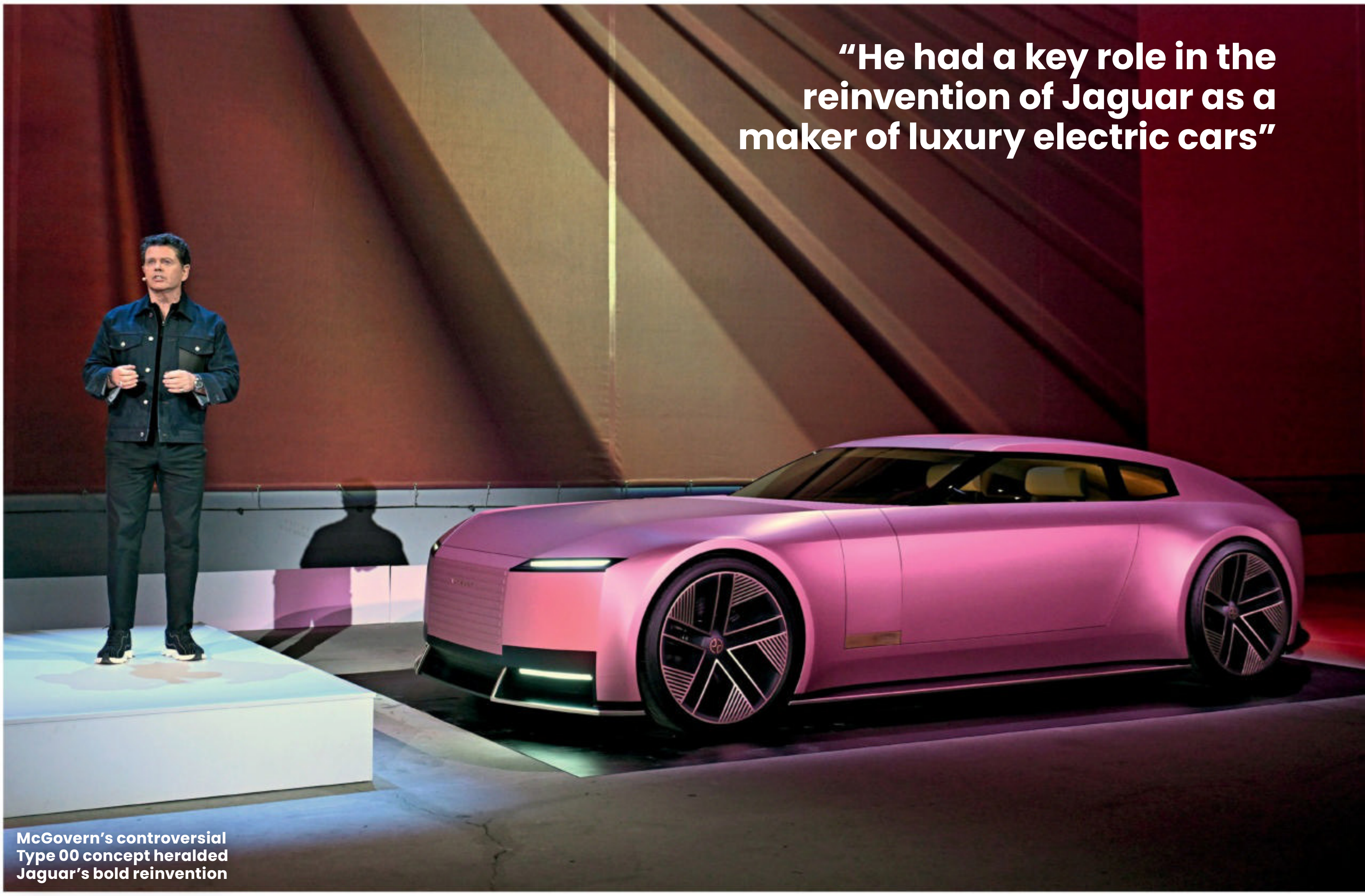
The news came as a shock to the automotive industry, given McGovern's hugely influential position on the JLR board. He was also a favourite of the late Ratan Tata, former chairman of the Tata Group.

McGovern took over as Land Rover's design boss in 2004 when it was owned by Ford, and later joined JLR's executive board alongside his creative director duties.

Coventry-born McGovern was responsible for the modern-day reinvention of the Land Rover Defender and was instrumental in maintaining the popularity of the Range Rover line-up.

He also had a key role in the creation of JLR's 2021 Reimagine strategy, which turned the company into a 'House of Brands' and reinvented Jaguar as a maker of luxury electric cars.

McGovern leaves just a few months before the first of those new Jaguar EVs is expected to be revealed.
WILL RIMELL



"He had a key role in the reinvention of Jaguar as a maker of luxury electric cars"

McGovern's controversial Type 00 concept heralded Jaguar's bold reinvention

WE GET FIRST TASTE OF VW'S 'PURE POSITIVE' ID CROSS EV

THE VOLKSWAGEN ID Cross will arrive next year as the second of Wolfsburg's new wave of affordable compact EVs – and we got our hands on an early version of the electric crossover.

Unlike the ID 3, ID 4 and ID 5 EVs, which all share a very similar form language and silhouette, the ID Cross and its ID Polo sibling will get more distinct visual identities from both each other and other VW Group EVs on the same platform.

ID Cross exterior designer Thorben Kochs told Autocar that "the idea was to create something super-stable and clean", adding: "We call it pure positive. We want to be the nice guys, you know?"

Inside, VW has returned to physical controls in response to customer

A POWER VACUUM OPENS AT JLR

STEVE CROPLEY

McGovern's level of control surpassed that of most design bosses

News of the abrupt departure of JLR's chief creative officer elicits feelings of both shock and long expectation, depending on which group of commentators you consult.

Reasons for the shock are clear enough: Gerry McGovern was given a huge amount of control over the 'reimagining' of Jaguar at the back end of 2020. What's shocking is that his close connection with the first new-era Jaguar model should be summarily severed merely months from its much heralded public debut.

The expectation faction's arguments are also easy to follow. Apparently unbidden, McGovern assumed a remarkable degree of autocratic control over not only the new Jaguars' designs but also many aspects of car creation that car designers don't usually oversee: publicity, advertising, brand development, timing, public statements and much more. No one at JLR seemed to have the intestinal fortitude to take him on, but many of those involved began to assume that such a situation was bound to cause festering resentments – and to end with a bang.

When PB Balaji, the new and deeply financially literate JLR CEO, recently arrived from the very core of the parent company, Tata, many (not least the outspoken Indian financial press) believed his first mission would be to bring JLR – and McGovern – to heel.

The conservative managers of Tata hadn't much enjoyed the adventurous, bizarre and often disastrously adverse publicity that had surrounded the unveiling of the Jaguar Type 00 concept car and the reshaping of a fine old brand that went with that.

My own feeling is that it's deeply disappointing not to see McGovern given the opportunity to see his first 'reimagined' Jaguar through to its public debut.

McGovern always instinctively provided what his marques needed: strong leadership and a feeling (for better or worse) of certainty about their direction of travel.

It's hard to see, now that his talented deputy Massimo Frascella has joined Audi, who could step up to provide such strength of leadership. But it will be a crying shame if JLR attempts to manage such a high-design mission via some faceless committee or do it from the boardroom. I'm pretty sure that Sir William Lyons wouldn't have approved of that for an idea.

McGOVERN'S GREATEST HITS

1985 MG EX-E concept

1995 MGF

1998 Land Rover Freelander

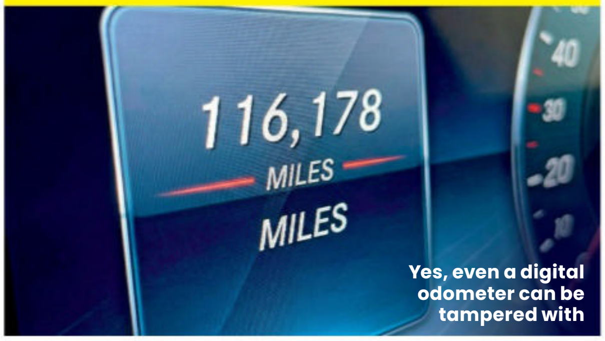
2001 Lincoln Mk9 concept

2019 Land Rover Defender

2022 Range Rover

Unfinished business

NICK GIBBS



Yes, even a digital odometer can be tampered with

THE OTHER DAY, a taxi driver openly admitted to me that he had halved the mileage on his Mercedes E-Class PHEV to about 100,000. He 'clocks' it annually so as not to trigger any warning flags come MOT test time.

Taxi drivers might be the biggest culprits of clocking, because across Europe the E-Class had on average the highest number of erased kilometres in 2024 – 130,680 (81,200 miles) – according to data from vehicle history checking firm CarVertical.

Clocking is illegal but poorly policed and lucrative enough that, when selling leggy cars, premium ones especially, many will risk it.

Now the UK government has given clockers extra motivation with its new pay-per-mile tax, eVED, which is scheduled to come into force for owners of EVs and PHEVs from April 2028.

Instead of monitoring cars, the government has proposed a trust-based system that lets you guess your mileage for the year and pay in advance at the rate of 3p per mile for EVs and 1.5p per mile for PHEVs.

The AA had warned that the poor implementation of road pricing would be "political suicide", because the British public just hate being tracked. So Labour has found a far less intrusive solution that also happens to be cheap, saying it won't require drivers to report where and when miles are driven or fit trackers in their cars. So now we have a charter for clockers.

"An honesty-based system avoids the worst option, but a system built on up-front estimates, later reconciliation and occasional odo checks is wide open to exploitation," automotive consultant Andy Palmer told Autocar.

How exactly eVED will be implemented is subject to a public consultation. People may hate being tracked, but without a digital solution it will be a blunt instrument hitting those who swallowed the uncertainty of early EV ownership in the hope of saving some money.

The Office for Budget Responsibility admitted that eVED could reduce EV sales by 440,000 from now until 2031, with the Electric Car Grant clawing back only a fraction of those lost sales.

Car makers have voiced their opposition to eVED on this basis, especially as they have the government's own ZEV mandate targets to hit.

New Zealand has decided that its populace can cope with electronic devices to implement its own road charging system. Unless it can find a way to defeat the clocking menace, the UK might have to do the same.

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feedback, with traditional door handles, four separate window switches, climate control buttons on the dash and proper buttons on the steering wheel.

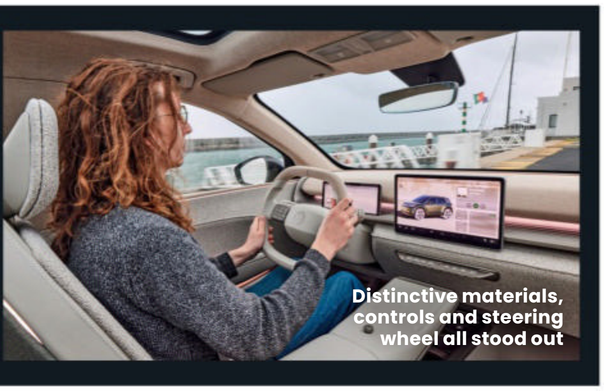
The materials inside our test car were novel and of a high quality, but they will be toned down for production.

"What will come is new, softer, high-value materials. We don't want to have it all in plastic: that's something we've learned," said Kochs.

In practicality terms, the ID Cross takes full advantage of having its motor at the front, with a deep well in the boot.

Given our car was more of a show concept than a representative prototype, it didn't tell us anything about how the ID Cross will drive, but it did suggest a driving position that feels comfortable and less awkward than that in the rival Peugeot e-2008.

However, we weren't convinced by the square steering wheel. Kochs said that because the corners are all on the same radius from the centre, it will be intuitive to drive, but there's no obvious advantage over a round wheel.



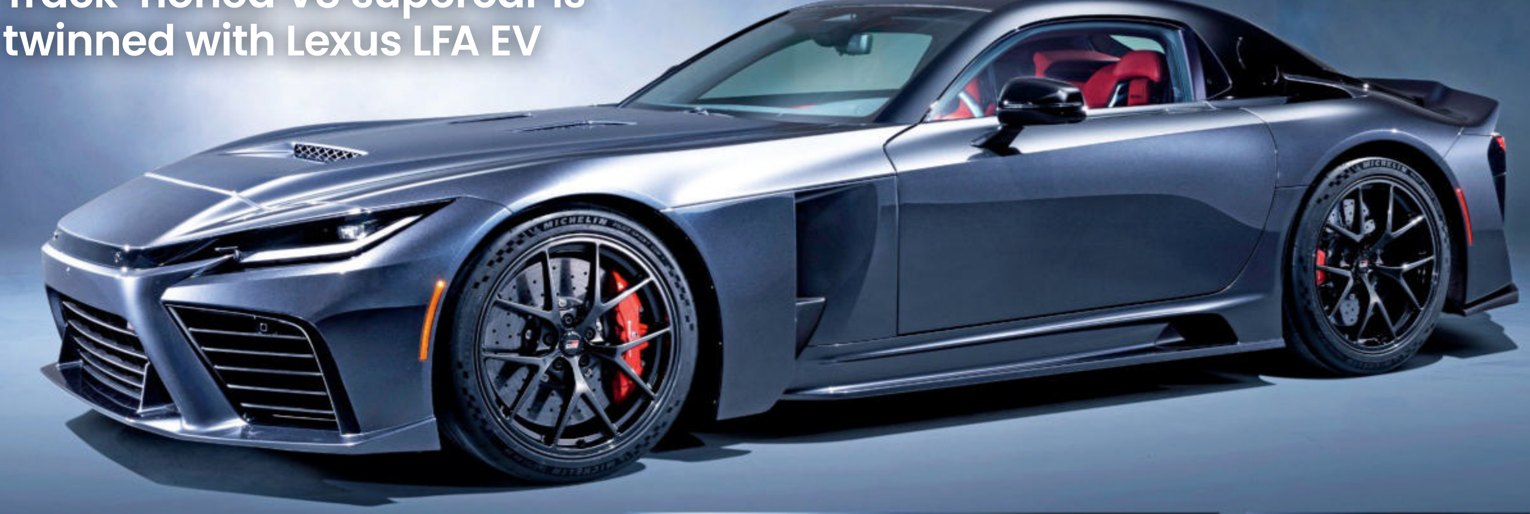
Distinctive materials, controls and steering wheel all stood out

GETTY IMAGES

OFFICIAL PICTURES

TOYOTA'S NEW GR GT IS 'ROAD-LEGAL RACE CAR'

Track-honed V8 supercar is twinned with Lexus LFA EV



Toyota has finally revealed its flagship V8 supercar – due on sale in around two years as a storming, 641bhp rival to the Mercedes-AMG GT and Aston Martin Vantage.

The GR GT – named for Toyota's Gazoo Racing performance division – has been conceived as a "road-legal race car". Indeed, the road-going and GT3-spec racing versions have been revealed simultaneously, reflecting the fact that they were engineered in parallel.

Together with the related but pure-electric new Lexus LFA supercar (see below), the GR GT duo form what Toyota calls a 'trinity' of high-performance flagships aimed at emphasising its engineering prowess and technical capabilities – honed on the race track.

Japan's answer to the Mercedes-AMG GT uses a new 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 as part of a hybrid powertrain that pumps a targeted 641bhp and 627lb ft to the rear wheels through a carbonfibre-reinforced torque tube – although the company said development is still ongoing and the final figures could be higher.

No performance figures have been disclosed yet beyond a target top speed of at least 198mph, but a 0-62mph time in the region of 3.5sec is well within reach.

The engine is described as "thoroughly light and compact", courtesy of its 'hot vee' set-up – with the turbos mounted inside the cylinder banks – as well as the dry-sump lubrication system and slimline oil pan.

It sends its power through an eight-speed automatic gearbox, also all-new, which features a wet clutch instead of a torque converter to help provide "world-class shift speeds", and a mechanical limited-slip differential.

The electric motor (for which no specs have been given) is mounted ahead of the gearbox and serves to fill the gap between shifts to avoid any loss in torque.

The GR GT's race-honed conception is evident in its aerodynamically optimised styling and driver-focused cockpit, which Toyota said has been honed for use by "both professional and gentleman drivers" while also being geared towards both track and daily driving.

Priorities for the cabin were to maximise visibility, enhance the sense of protection and offer "the ideal driving position".

Special focus has been placed on ensuring all switches are suitably shaped and easy to reach, with a view to achieving "excellent operability".

Keeping weight down and maximising rigidity are the other core pillars of the GR GT's development, with Toyota aiming for the GR GT to offer "a linear response and a high level of controllability" whether on track or in town.

It's the first Toyota with an aluminium body-in-white, and the panels on top are partly aluminium too, as are the main suspension components.

The brake discs are carbon Brembo items.

The end result is that the GR GT will weigh less than 1750kg, split 45% front and 55% rear, which will make it around 300kg lighter than the four-wheel-drive AMG GT and almost exactly the same kerb weight as the rear-driven Vantage.

FELIX PAGE

Aerodynamics have been central to body design

GT3 racing version was revealed at same time

Driver-focused two-seat cabin is set up for daily use

SOUND CHECK

The soundtrack was a central component of the engineering process: Toyota wanted it to deliver "not only high-level performance but also the distinctive racing sound of a V8 twin-turbo engine". It said the exhaust has been "meticulously crafted to produce sound that synchronises with the state of the vehicle".

BADGE OF HONOUR

Neither version of the GR GT features a Toyota badge anywhere on its exterior or interior, in line with the carving out of Gazoo as its own dedicated brand within the Toyota group, like Lexus and Century.

LEXUS TO REVIVE LFA NAME FOR ELECTRIC-ONLY VERSION

Toyota luxury brand Lexus will reprise the name of its LFA supercar for an electric version of the GR GT.

Being developed alongside the V8 Toyota and sharing its basic, aluminium-intensive innards, the new Lexus flagship is said to benefit from the packaging freedoms afforded by an EV powertrain.

It was revealed as the Sport Concept last year at the Pebble Beach show in California but has now been given its V10 predecessor's hallowed name because "the model name LFA is not bound to vehicles powered by internal combustion engines", said Lexus.

No further specifications of the two-seater have been revealed and, unlike for the GR GT, neither has a targeted launch date. But Toyota has suggested it plans to deploy its first solid-state battery in a "high-power" EV in 2027 or 2028, and the LFA is a likely candidate.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Cadillac is heading to UK roads with the Lyriq EV and to F1 with Pat Symonds

TUESDAY

One of the year-end pleasures for me and Matt Prior is organising Christmas interview guests for our podcast, My Week In Cars, which runs through December in four episodes, rather than two bumper issues like the magazine. One fascinating guest you will hear from is Pat Symonds, engineering hero of Formula 1, who at the beginning of the year became technical guru of the new-for-2026 Cadillac F1 team. Given that Symonds spent the previous seven years at F1 Management framing forthcoming regs, there's no better person to ask about the sport's future.

Yet it's the new prominence of the Cadillac brand on this side of the pond that intrigues me. Symonds says his race team, initially based at Silverstone, will become the centre of a huge new visitor-oriented complex in Indianapolis, a kind of Maranello that welcomes visitors (my words, not his). This goes with a new, worldwide prominence for Cadillac cars (the Lyriq electric SUV is due over here soon).

Years ago, a Cadillac designer told me that he believed a Caddy was "the opposite of a Jaguar". It will be interesting to see how the debut cars from these two great marques fare in 2026.

Gerry McGovern is a design great, Cropley reminds his detractors

> "Acting too big for his boots has always been part of his shtick"

WEDNESDAY

Writing the day after the 'Gerry McGovern and JLR part ways' bombshell (p12), I find it deeply depressing to see how much utter nonsense people have bothered to post online. Personal abuse of a brave and massively talented man, regrettably prevalent, especially gets my goat.

The bottom line is that McGovern is a brilliant designer, part of whose shtick has always been acting too big for his boots. It has motivated his teams and his management to go further in producing wonderful work and has made – and will continue to make – billions at Land Rover.

The new Jaguar plan – which will have had early approval from Tata, don't forget – has created serious adverse publicity and caused anxiety among the new bosses. A falling out has occurred. But that doesn't mean the Type 00 is a failure. In fact, given that other car designers have started using related styling solutions, it might yet turn out to be a smash hit. Remember BMW's Chris Bangle and his controversial 'flame surfacing', which still endures all over the place.

For me, McGovern will always be one of the world's greatest car designers, no matter how he left the JLR building. He's also a man of courage; I'd like to think he isn't finished yet.

THURSDAY

Yasa, Oxfordshire's rule-busting electric motor manufacturer, now owned by Mercedes-Benz, is claiming an astounding new power record for one of its axial-flux motors 40% higher than a mark it set just this summer. The latest prototype pumps out 750kW (1006bhp) yet weighs just 12.7kg. To simplify, this is F1-level power from a machine weighing half as much as the cabin baggage you'll be allowed on your next British Airways flight. Amazing.

Yet for me and many, the true fascination of such efficiency isn't so much about power as size. If a cabin bag can produce 1000bhp, how small and light must the axial-flux motor be that can happily power my 148bhp Renault 5?

FRIDAY

I've had as much as I can stomach of tyre pressure measuring systems. Less than a week from being serviced, our 69-plate Mini Cooper S starts showing pressure warnings, yet the car looks normal and steers and handles the same way. So what's the problem? My take is that the ambient temperature has fallen from 9deg C to freezing in the past few days, which has reduced our pressures beyond a silly threshold. On the weekend I'm going to see if there's a way of switching the whole damned thing off, to live happily ever after in a tyre kicker's world.

AND ANOTHER THING

How's this for an amazing sight? The complex mechanicals of the world's one and only Jaguar XJ13 are revealed to the world during a bout of mechanical titivation at its Gaydon home – and there's a balcony overlooking the workshop that allows visitors to view every nuance of activity. I've done it often, but it's never less than a privilege.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

The inadvertent early release of last month’s Autumn Budget details by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) – which compelled its boss to resign – was apparently not the only error the UK’s fiscal watchdog made at the time.

When the OBR predicted that the upcoming pay-per-mile tax on EVs would reduce demand for them by 440,000 between now and 2031, it initially said the existing Electric Car Grant, plus raising the threshold of the Expensive Car Supplement (of £2370, spread over five years) from £40,000 to £50,000 for EVs, would offset that number by only 130,000. But within a few hours, it amended that to 320,000.

Quite the difference. Can you really see either measure persuading a third of a million people to buy a type of car that they otherwise wouldn’t? I’m not sure I can. What I can see arising from the ‘luxury car tax’ threshold increase is manufacturers putting up the list prices of some EVs they’ve been keeping under the bar.

Even if the countermeasures are as successful as the OBR (eventually) predicted in attracting buyers for EVs, the industry is still looking at reduced demand for them, over a time when the proportion of new EV registrations legally has to rise from 28% this year to 80% in 2030.

The new pay-per-mile tax, then, won’t affect EVs alone, because their success or otherwise directly impacts the sales of combustion-engined cars. If manufacturers don’t sell enough EVs, they won’t be allowed to sell as many ICE cars, unless they (or you) want to pay a £15,000 fine for every single car over the allotted limit.

Indeed, the OBR noted that “to meet the [zero-emission vehicle] mandate, manufacturers would therefore need to respond through lowering [EV] prices or reducing sales of non-EV vehicles”.

Cars are living longer. Is that a good thing?

Given that batteries are expensive and profit margins are already thin, I don’t suppose that lowering EV prices is either a particularly palatable or viable option for manufacturers. In fact, some cars will get dearer.

Which means that limiting sales of ICE cars will be the only way that some manufacturers will be able to comply with the ZEV mandate, so the OBR thinks and so legislators must know.

But that means fewer cars will be sold overall and the UK’s already-ageing car fleet, now over 10 years old on average, will age further still.

I don’t think that fewer cars being sold is intrinsically a bad thing. After all, if fewer toasters were sold each year, I would find that quite encouraging. It would suggest that toasters were lasting longer – unless there were a big change in toaster use, of course. And while fewer toasters being replaced would be bad news for retailers of home appliances, it would be rather better news for the planet and for consumers.

> **“The new pay-per-mile tax on EVs will impact ICE cars too”**

But the reality with cars is rather different. This isn’t about reliability or choice. If ICE car sales do end up being artificially stifled, it won’t be because cars are all lasting longer, it will be because legislation is designed to make it that way. Getting people out of cars by making them expensive is part of a plan.

I don’t suppose it’s one that will work. The car – any car, including an old one – is so routinely better than the alternative, if there even is one, that we will find a way. We will muddle through and get to where we need to be, carrying all the things we need to be carrying, regardless of the objects that some lanyardista who doesn’t understand people puts in our way.

But wouldn’t it be nice to be told by someone that, yes, we understand the freedom of flexibility of the car, that we think it should be applauded and not punished, and this is how we’re going to support you getting on with your motoring life? I would predict good things at ballot boxes for anyone who did so.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

May I take this opportunity to say thank you for supporting Autocar this year? Through whatever media you’ve done it, whether it be print or one of the online options, we appreciate it more than you know. Merry Christmas, and I will see you again in a couple of weeks.

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

The fates of petrol and electric cars are intertwined

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Ogier's commitment during his part-time, title-winning campaign was never in doubt

At 41 and supposedly as a part-time rally driver, Sébastien Ogier has equalled the record of his old nemesis Sébastien Loeb to become a nine-time World Rally Champion. The Frenchman competed in only 11 of the 14 rounds this year, won six of them and pipped Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans to glory in the Saudi Arabian finale.

Ogier's place among the greats was already secure, but this achievement enhances his status. He admitted that it was perhaps the best of his nine title wins. Loeb took all of his with Citroën, whereas Ogier's have been collected with three manufacturers: Volkswagen (four times), Ford (twice) and Toyota (three times).

CLOUD NINE

Until recently, Ogier showed little interest in chasing Loeb's record, especially as his priorities had shifted. "I never thought that this moment of a ninth title would come after I decided to make a change and spend more time with my family," he said.

The inaugural Saudi WRC round proved a tough affair, with a spate of punctures shaking up the usual order. Ogier was only sixth heading into the final leg, but crucially Evans was behind him and he then held a two-point advantage.

The Welshman gave his all, as usual, but a characteristic charge on the penultimate stage lifted Ogier to third overall, then a measured drive through the Power Stage finale was all that he needed to become champion again, for the first time since 2021.

"What a fight it has been with Elfyn and Scott [Martin]," said Ogier with typical grace. "A great champion needs great opponents, and they have been super-strong and pushing us to the limits until the very last stage of the year."

He also paid tribute to his own co-driver, Vincent Landais, who has been with him since 2022 and for whom this was a cherished first title.

So now what? Ogier will rally on with Toyota in 2026 but in only 10 rounds. Painfully, Evans is now a five-time WRC runner-up, but he will have another chance to join Colin McRae and Richard Burns as a British WRC king.

> "I never thought this moment of a ninth title would come"

Sadly, the championship will be weakened by the departures of Kalle Rovanperä – bound for Japan and an audacious switch to the Super Formula single-seater series – and Hyundai's Ott Tänak. So even with a limited programme, Ogier can go one better than Loeb and become the first to hit 10 titles. It's not the reason he rallies on into his forties, but it must be in the back of his mind.

ECHOES OF CHAPMAN

Is Adrian Newey biting off too much? That's a common question as Formula 1's greatest designer takes on the ultimate responsibility at Aston Martin. Not only is Newey shaping the all-new, Honda-powered contender on which such high expectations rest under F1's new-for-2026 regulations, but he will also now serve as team principal.

Newey will be a team principal for the first time

It strikes me that perhaps Newey's latest move might be influenced by the man who inspired his F1 obsession in the first place: Colin Chapman. Okay, Newey isn't the founder of the Aston Martin F1 team, as Chapman was of Team Lotus, but the old man did manage to balance chasing the next engineering innovation by his own hand with leading from the front as Lotus's commercial force. Chapman *was* Lotus, and even though the significant shadow of Lawrence Stroll can never be ignored, perhaps Aston's F1 operation is to be defined now by Newey in a similar fashion.

As a car designer, Newey has won a record 13 drivers' championships and 12 constructors' crowns over the span of four decades, with Williams, McLaren and Red Bull – but if he can add to that remarkable roster as both team leader and chief technical architect at Aston, it might well be considered his crowning glory.

Reserved in character, Newey is the polar opposite of the avuncular Chapman, but there's no doubt that he's driven by a burning ego and ambition, just like his childhood hero.

It has been 43 long years since Chapman was taken from us too soon by a heart attack at just 54, but his influence on F1 remains indelible. And to the end he was totally immersed in his team – as Newey is now at Aston.

Earlier this year, I asked one of Chapman's great lieutenants, the late Peter Wright (the so-called father of F1 ground-effects aerodynamics), whether there was any resentment that his old boss got the lion's share of credit for Lotus's '60s and '70s innovations. Absolutely not, he replied: "There's no doubt at all that without Colin, those breakthroughs wouldn't have happened. He had an instinct for technology, what was worth pursuing and what wasn't. And when he thought it was worth pursuing, he would throw the whole bloody company behind it."

That will chime with Newey. Whatever it takes, he yearns to win again, and on his own terms.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

THE TRUTH ABOUT MOTABILITY

As a disabled driver who has been on Motability for years, allow me to share my thoughts on the removal of 'premium brands' from the scheme while the Daily Mail brigade rub themselves in rage butter.

I've never understood why those were included – nor why eligibility isn't means-tested, so that those of us who can afford a car can just buy one. As for those of us who can't, well, isn't that why Motability was set up?

Years of abuse have led to people tarring us all with the same brush. They start waving flags and pointing out the flaws in the system, rather than putting forward ways to fix it.

So why do I need a Motability car? Well, first off, I use a wheelchair. I opted for and bought – myself! – an electric one. I live alone, I have no taxi or bus services near me that are wheelchair-accessible and I live a mile away from the nearest shop, so a car is more or less a lifeline for me.

I drive a Nissan Juke that has been fitted with a hoist that allows me to get the chair into the back. This came at the cost of two seats, but now I can drive myself to the shops and to appointments. Should that be taken away from me because some rich person is rigging the system?

If I want a 'better' Juke, I need to pay a premium, so it's not just the 'luxury' cars that cost extra. Oh, maybe you didn't know that bit: to get a luxury car, you had to pay a premium on top of your PIP [personal independence payment], in some cases thousands, so certainly not for free, and you don't get it back.

So I have a basic hybrid automatic that gets me about, and I'm more than happy with it. Would I like a Mercedes? Of course, but I can't afford it, even on Motability. So really the only people who this change is going to affect are those who could afford to pay the extra premium to get a luxury car in the first place.

So to those who rant about Motability, give your head a wobble and target your rage at the idiots who work the system, not those of us who wouldn't have a great life without it.

JR Bradley, via autocar.co.uk

SOME MOT ADVISORIES

I was really interested in your recent report about the cost of the MOT test (News, 12 November). I have a vested interest, as I work for a firm that supplies and calibrates MOT testing equipment. However, I feel this puts me in the ideal position to explain the situation.

You may not be aware of the large investment a garage has to make to be an MOT testing station. To start, there are days and days of expensive DVSA training for staff, managers and testers. Then there's the fitting of the equipment, which can cost around £30k-£40k, then the best part of £10k on building works.

Then the garage has to cover the cost of calibrations every six months, testers' training annually and ad hoc equipment repairs. They even have to buy an MOT certificate (called a testing slot) from the DVSA.

It's not unusual for an MOT tester to be paid £20 per hour; add the cost of holidays, national insurance etc and you can see how much it costs a garage to run a test bay.

There's also huge responsibility placed on the garage by the DVSA to comply with very strict regulations.

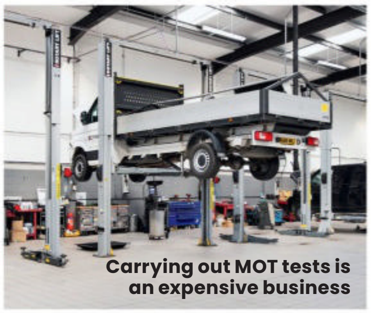
MOT testing equipment can live a hard life and will eventually need to be replaced. For example, many test bays still use brake testers that are more than 35 years old, but the garages can't afford to replace them.

If the MOT test fee were increased from the current £55 to about £80 (there's no VAT, remember) it would better reflect the cost to the garage. That's just £1.53 per week over the year to ensure your car is safe.

Your report noted that many garages discount the fee. I ask you to consider how such garages might cover the cost. Are they a bit stricter on the test so they fail more cars? Are they charging more for service work to make up for the losses?

The MOT fee hasn't changed for 15 years. It should be somewhere between £80 and £100 – and it should be a fixed fee, no discounts allowed.

Name supplied
Via email



Carrying out MOT tests is an expensive business

NEW ORDER

As ever, I enjoyed your latest Britain's Best Driver's Car report (Autocar, 19 November), but the prices asked for some of this year's exotica are way beyond my reach.

Consequently, I have devised an index of affordability (aka 'bangs for one's buck'), whereby the judges' scorecard totals were divided by the vehicles' stated purchase prices.

Being well aware of the adage that 'there are lies, damn lies and statistics', the new top three are the Alpine A290 (index: 218), Audi RS3 (363) and BMW M2 CS (497), while in last place by some distance is the Lamborghini Revuelto (2430).

Given that the same Autocar issue had an item entitled 'When everyday cars sneaked into the BBDC', I rest my case. However, if I decide to buy a lottery ticket and have a significant win, 'alternative facts' might change my approach…

David Yorke
Via email

These are the real heroes of Handling Day, claims David

QUICK TO JUDGE

Peter Worth provided some great ammunition for the anti-speed lobby (5 November). Drivers doing 50mph in a 60mph limit are not the problem: they're perfectly entitled to do so. The problem is other drivers who are intolerant, impatient and lacking the skills to deal with the situation safely.

The follow-up from various contributors (19 November) was again ideal material for the elements who think drivers are selfish and irresponsible. Extreme fabrication and hyperbole, such as suggesting the condoning of blanket 10mph limits, preventing overtaking and people with red flags in front of cars don't help the debate but rather reinforce the view that drivers aren't to be trusted.

Maybe a bit of moderation, in both the argument and the driving, would prove that speed alone is not the problem (although reducing it does give you more time to react to the other factors that cause collisions), so continually reducing limits alone is not the solution.

Scott Robison
Via email

You'll soon pay more to have one of these – no exceptions

BUDGET MISERY

We were early adopters of EVs and have two at present, but in the years we have had EVs, all we have seen is the industry and the government inventing new ways to bleed us dry.

I don't do long journeys in our EVs, but if I were to, fast chargers cost up to 80p per kWh, so with a 100kWh battery we're talking £80 to do 300 miles. Now from 2028 we will also have to add 3p per mile in tax (and that is just the starting price; subsequent budgets will bring increases). So that brings the total for my journey to £90.

A decent petrol car would probably do that for £50 – and it would have been cheaper to buy.

Up until now I've defended EVs, but the budget was just the last straw. I will probably keep my electric van, as it is ideal for short journeys, but the rest, well, we will see. I will also be using my V6 diesel Land Rover Discovery 5 more often.

Clive Johnson
Via Facebook

NO EV REGRETS

As a long-time EV owner, I can't say I'm surprised or bothered much by the chancellor's news. The amount of money (and energy!) we've saved compared with our previous petrol and diesel cars is staggering. And the convenience of the car being fully charged every morning and not wasting time with dirty diesel or petrol at filling stations is another bonus of driving an EV.

Stephen Pearson-Jacklin
Via Facebook

PHEV PAIN

We have a plug-in hybrid that can do a maximum of only 22 miles on a full charge, and that's being generous; it's more like 15 miles in reality. We already pay duty on fuel and a VED surcharge of £55 per month because it's a 'luxury vehicle'. At this rate, people like us will be getting hit from all sides.

Janine Fletcher
Via Facebook

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

DRAGON'S BREATH
CERAMIC SHAMPOO
Valet PRO

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

The next issue

ON SALE 31 DECEMBER

ROAD TRIP

MUSTANG GTD LETS RIP IN THE US

Ford calls it supercar power with a Mustang soul. Find out what Matt Prior calls it when he drives the 815bhp muscle car in Palm Springs

FIRST DRIVE

NEW RENAULT CLIO RATED

The supermini has a shock new look but how does it drive? We reveal all

FEATURE

THE ULTIMATE AUTOMOTIVE HEAD-TO-HEADS

Golf GTI vs 205 GTi… Hunt vs Lauda… These and many more revisited

EVERY WEEK

ROAD TEST

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA EQ

Cutting-edge new Tesla Model 3 rival laid bare in the toughest test

LIVING WITH AN…

AUDI Q6 E-TRON

This SUV is a vital next-gen EV for Audi. But is it cut out for daily life?

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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The original car magazine, published since 1895 'in the interests of the mechanically propelled road carriage'

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 26.11.25, MALAGA, SPAIN **ON SALE** MARCH 2026

BMW iX3

Medium-sized SUV is the first member of BMW's much-hyped Neue Klasse of EVs

You will read a lot about how the new iX3 is the first of a whole new generation of BMWs; how significant the company thinks its Neue Klasse ('new class') EV platform is; and how this is its first software-defined car. The R&D boss even called it a "masterpiece", which I think is slightly overblowing a mass-market electric SUV. But beyond all the hype, just know that, first and foremost, the iX3 is a BMW that drives very well in the traditional BMW style.

To the neue bits first, then. While most electric BMWs run on platforms shared with their combustion-engined stablemates, the iX3, upcoming i3 saloon and others will have this bespoke electric one, because their higher sales volumes make it worth developing them that way, even while outwardly similar ICE cars will stay on sale alongside them.

This EV's battery isn't just under the chassis: the top of the 108.7kWh (usable capacity) pack, which contains cylindrical cells and is said to be 20% more energy dense than BMW's previous one, constitutes the cabin floor and is a structural part of things. It gives a WLTP range of 500 miles and, thanks to an 800V electrical system, can be charged at 400kW.

The 50 xDrive model I'm driving has two motors: a synchronous one at the rear, making 322bhp, and a 165bhp asynchronous ▸

TESTER'S NOTE
Since when was in-menu touchscreen control for an electrically actuated air vent easier or cheaper than a slider and/or knob, and which customer ever asked for it? **MP**

"It's linearly, predictably and immediately responsive"

◂ one at the front. This type is less efficient, but the iX3's rear-biased delivery means it's not always pitching in, so that doesn't matter so much, and importantly it's cheaper.

On top is a tautly styled body and what I think is a cute upright kidney grille. Given the sizes and shapes of some recent BMW noses, I think this is an attractive face. The iX3 is 4.78m long, so around 3 Series length, and while it looks like an SUV, at 1.64m high it could be thought of as a tall estate.

Inside, the most obvious departure from manufacturer norms is a new Panoramic iDrive system, which projects digital instruments onto a wide strip along the bottom of the windscreen. This means there are no dials to view through the steering wheel – a bit like with Peugeot's i-Cockpit concept but more successful, because the instruments sit higher and, because they're projected, have a longer focal length.

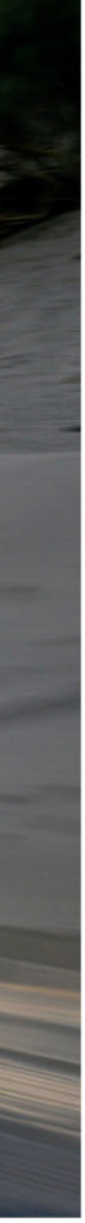
Because you're sitting on top of the battery and because the steering wheel doesn't lift up as high as in other BMWs, there's no bum-on-floor, wheel-at-shoulder driving position available, which will be a shame if that's your bag. Sometimes it's mine.

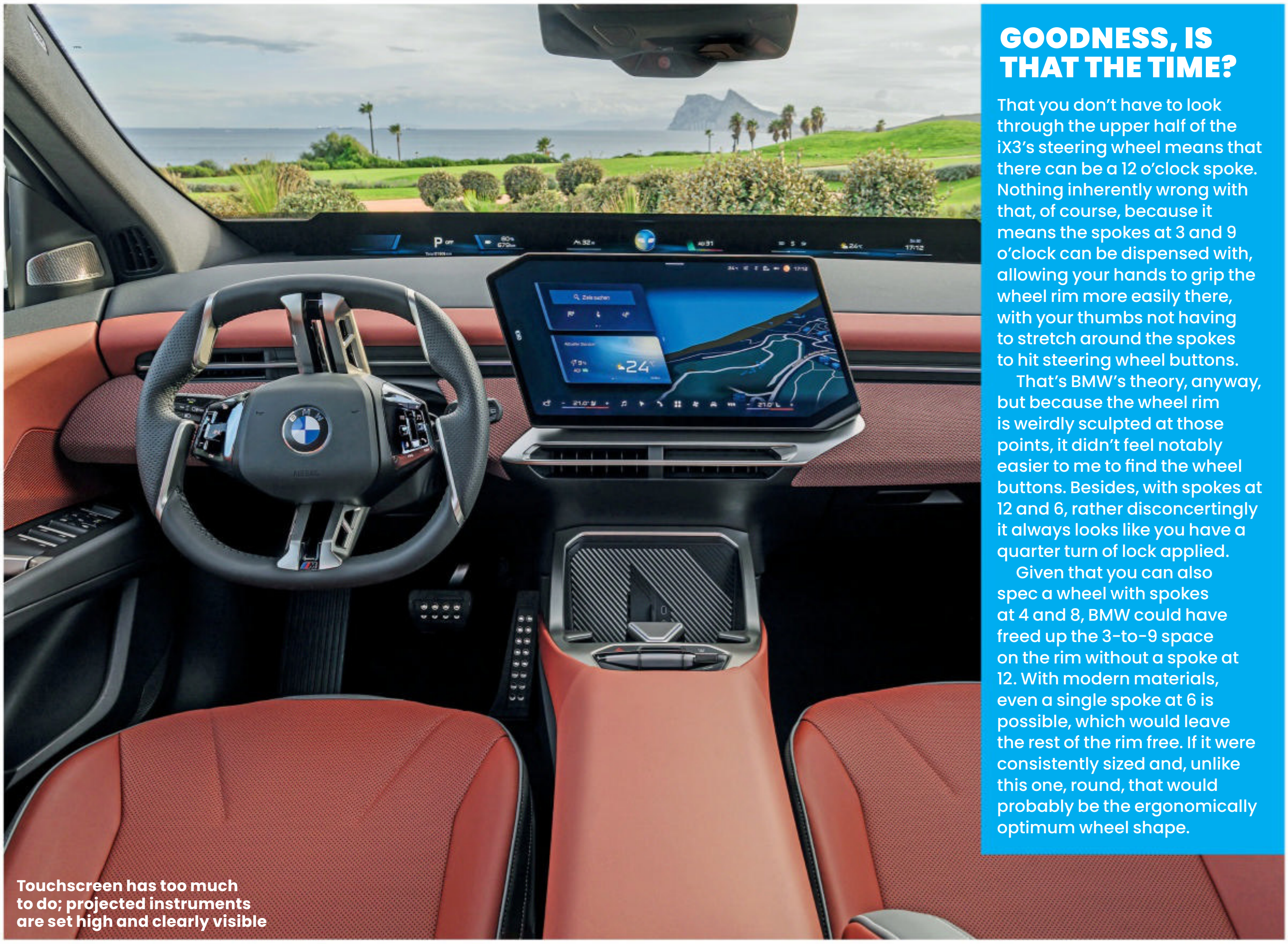
The cabin is elsewhere clean, with minimal switchgear. There are window and mirror switches on the door armrest and a small scattering of drive essentials in the centre, but the rest – not just cabin temperature but even air vent direction and strength – is relegated to the huge touchscreen. It's tasked with too much and some drivers might find its text too small.

Big batteries are expensive, so there are some cost-saving scratchy plastics in the lower and rear of the interior, which is a shame, and cost-reducing passive coil springs and dampers, which seemingly isn't a pity at all. Suspension is by struts at the front and a multi-link arrangement behind.

The passive set-up is not only

It's an all-new EV platform, but the balance of ride and handling is classically BMW





Touchscreen has too much to do; projected instruments are set high and clearly visible

GOODNESS, IS THAT THE TIME?

That you don't have to look through the upper half of the iX3's steering wheel means that there can be a 12 o'clock spoke. Nothing inherently wrong with that, of course, because it means the spokes at 3 and 9 o'clock can be dispensed with, allowing your hands to grip the wheel rim more easily there, with your thumbs not having to stretch around the spokes to hit steering wheel buttons.

That's BMW's theory, anyway, but because the wheel rim is weirdly sculpted at those points, it didn't feel notably easier to me to find the wheel buttons. Besides, with spokes at 12 and 6, rather disconcertingly it always looks like you have a quarter turn of lock applied.

Given that you can also spec a wheel with spokes at 4 and 8, BMW could have freed up the 3-to-9 space on the rim without a spoke at 12. With modern materials, even a single spoke at 6 is possible, which would leave the rest of the rim free. If it were consistently sized and, unlike this one, round, that would probably be the ergonomically optimum wheel shape.

cheaper than equipping a car with, say, adjustable air springs, adaptive dampers and/or anti-roll bars and rear-steering, it also requires no electric power to run it, which means the juice can be saved for forward motion.

And while the iX3 is heavy, at 2285kg unladen in this spec, the heaviest bit is low and central, the weight is distributed 50:50 and dynamics engineers are getting ever better at disguising mass.

And BMW's lot have set the iX3 up really rather well. Its ride has a fine meld of comfort and body control, absorbent here but tight there. It steers smoothly, medium-weighted, medium-speed, entirely appropriate. If you do shift through the drive modes, you're given more weight and road feel, but the bigger difference is in throttle response.

And it's the powertrain's integration into the dynamics that gets BMW's engineers most excited. They say that 98% of all braking will be done through regeneration, rather than disc use. And because the responses of motor-generators are measured in mere milliseconds and there are fewer masses vibrating or flexibly attached to the chassis, they say they can develop a car that's linearly, predictably and immediately responsive. And so they have. It's very good.

BMW even laid on a little time at the demanding Ascari test track for some cornering plus some slalom/extreme lane-change exercises, where the iX3 showed a tendency towards mild steady-state understeer, as it should, but also a willingness to tighten its line on-throttle, surprisingly but pleasingly.

Nobody is going to track an iX3, of course, but it bodes well for the lower, lighter, keener i3 that's less than a year away. Meanwhile, I'm inclined to think that the best elements of the new class are the elements that BMW did so well with its old classes.

MATT PRIOR

The rear is roomy and the middle seat isn't hampered by a hump

There's a useful 58-litre frunk for the charging cables

TECH SPEC

BMW iX3 50 xDRIVE M SPORT PRO

Efficient and keen to drive. At its best in areas in which BMW has traditionally performed well

Price £62,755
Engine Asynchronous motor (front), separately excited synchronous motor (rear)
Power 462bhp
Torque 476lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2285kg
0-62mph 4.9sec
Top speed 130mph
Battery 112.0/108.7kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 500 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q6 E-tron, Mercedes-Benz GLC EQ, Tesla Model Y

TESTED 2.12.25, INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA **DELIVERIES** MARCH 2026

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA HYBRID

New saloon has changed the EV game. Is the ICE version as impressive?

Fresh from shaking up the executive EV market with its 500-mile range, lightning-fast charging and commendable dynamics, the new Mercedes CLA has gained a hybrid version to broaden its appeal in a market that's still more than a little wary of electric propulsion.

Mercedes hasn't retrofitted an ICE powertrain into an EV platform, rather it developed the two options in parallel, because the new MMA platform underneath the CLA was engineered from the start to accept both – which is said to have kept any mechanical or packaging compromises to a minimum.

That means that, aside from the mechanicals, some subtle exterior cues and the obvious absence of a frunk, the hybrid CLA is exactly the same as the electric CLA, inside and out – so what we've said about the car's cabin remains true here.

It's still comfortable, spacious, well specified and technically impressive, if short on real premium appeal and sorely lacking in physical controls, with the vast Superscreen serving as the primary interface for driver and passenger, assisted by voice control. It's all fine, but switches and buttons are nicer.

With that said, we will focus here on the differences in performance, usability and dynamics of the hybrid compared with the EV.

The hybrid uses a new 1.5-litre turbo petrol four that runs on the Miller cycle, supported by a 30bhp electric motor within an eight-speed automatic gearbox. It's a pretty conventional mild-hybrid arrangement that uses the electric component for a power boost under load and for engine-off running at low speeds over short distances.

I tried the mid-rung 161bhp CLA 200 and the range-topping 187bhp CLA 220. Both had 4Matic four-wheel drive, but the former will be exclusively front-driven in the UK, as will the CLA 180, which opens the model range at £38,700.

Powertrain aside, EV and hybrid variants are all but identical

Mercedes went with four cylinders for its new entry-level engine because of the smoother and quieter characteristics that come from its inherently better balance, compared with a triple. And that decision is largely vindicated by the CLA's composure in normal running: when the engine takes over from the electric motor, it does so quietly and subtly, with no perceptible driveline shunt and only the faintest increase in noise.

Likewise, accelerative response at low speeds is essentially the same whether it's consuming petrol or electrons. Take-up is smooth, progressive and predictable either way and there's no tiresome step-off recoil or jabbiness to contend with.

Probe a bit harder, though, and it's easy enough to uncover some of the new engine's rougher edges. The CLA 200 feels short on pep under heavy loads, working a bit harder than you would expect to reach motorway speeds and needing to drop several cogs to maintain a decent lick up a steep hill.

You can manually shift up and down by pulling and pushing the drive-selector stalk, which feels contrived and unnatural but does at least give you some control over the gearbox, which is a boon when it's unwilling to shift up and the engine starts sounding especially strained and thrashy – particularly the weaker version in the CLA 200.

The CLA 220's engine brings a slight but tangible increase in grunt, which helps to make the CLA feel more like the downsized executive mile-muncher it wants to be, but all the same there seems to be plenty of headroom for Mercedes to add some pokier variants that feel a bit more relaxed and effortless when you wind them up.

Happily, the engineers quietly admit that while the MMA platform can't take anything larger than the new four (whose compact, square footprint makes it not much heftier than the EV's motors), there is scope to squeeze more power out of it.

Choosing combustion power also flips the drivetrain configuration, with the CLA hybrid running a natively front-driven arrangement. I drove only 4Matic variants, which light up their rear wheels in high-demand situations (frequent on my snowy Alpine test route), so it remains to be seen whether the rear-driven EV's secure and pleasantly uncorrupted dynamics translate to a front-driven format.

The CLA 220 4Matic was largely untroubled by what I threw at it, though, feeling planted and manoeuvrable on the tighter, faster stretches, stable and sure-footed at a high-speed cruise and sprightly off the mark.

Mind you, the combination of a slightly underpowered engine and a hint of lethargy in the gearbox made for a hesitant response on kickdown when exiting a fast corner. This isn't a powertrain that lends itself especially well to exuberant driving.

The chassis also better suits daily drudgery than flamboyance, with steering that's precise and weighty but not so communicative and commendably cushioned suspension that gives way to a touch of body roll in sharper bends.

Austrian roads are far better than ours, so the CLA has yet to face trial by a thousand potholes, but it put in a good shift over the rougher stretches I faced, nicely muffling cracks and bumps through the steering column and seat base, and was quiet on the motorway.

You might be attracted to the CLA hybrid on the basis that on paper it's an acclaimed new car short of the perceived utility constraints that come with an electric powertrain.

But when the EV goes so far on each charge, charges so quickly and generally makes electric motoring as palatable as possible, you have to question what you're saving yourself from in specifying your CLA with an ICE powertrain – not least because there's not that much between the two in list-price terms.

Also of note is that where the EV is one of the longest-range electric cars on sale, the hybrid's low- to mid-50s MPG figures don't feel especially awesome.

Indeed, the electric CLA has changed the mainstream EV game in so many ways that this hybrid model can't help feeling a little familiar by comparison – more like an evolution of the previous CLA than a revolution.

It's perfectly pleasant and very recommendable (stylish, comfy, sure-footed, well equipped), but it's more difficult here to identify any true 'wow' factor that knocks the alternatives into the weeds.

FELIX PAGE

> "The 220 4Matic felt planted and manoeuvrable on the tighter, faster stretches"

Physical controls cede to the Superscreen; driving position can be low if you like

TESTER'S NOTE

Voice control generally continues to frustrate, but Mercedes has almost cracked it. MB.OS Virtual Assistant uses ChatGPT and Google Gemini AI to generate genuinely helpful responses to queries, understands different accents and can actually be used to control a lot of in-car functions. **FP**

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA 220 4MATIC

A well-rounded and convincingly plush compact junior exec that ticks a lot of boxes – but less remarkable than its impressive electric sibling

Price £43,500
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1499cc, turbocharged, petrol, plus ISG
Power 187bhp
Torque 221lb ft
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 1770kg
0-62mph 7.1sec
Top speed 147mph
Economy 52.3mpg
CO_2, tax band 123g/km, 30%
Rivals Alfa Romeo Giulia, Audi A3 Saloon, BMW 2 Series Gran Coupé

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE
This is another of Stellantis's STLA Medium-platform EVs that seems heavy and over-engineered and thus lacks real-world efficiency. It's an uncharacteristic problem for a Citroën. **MS**

TESTED 2.12.25, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

CITROEN E-C5 AIRCROSS

All-new family SUV reaches Britain in small-battery electric form

Any electric car buyer who is offered an extra 100 miles of range for less than £400 of extra cost is almost certain to accept. Typically £400 gets you about two-thirds of a metallic paint job or half a towbar yet, thanks to the way the UK's Electric Car Grant scheme works, this is the scenario that buyers of the electric version of Citroën's new C5 Aircross will find themselves in.

By dint of its battery being made in France, the Long Range version of the ë-C5 Aircross qualifies for the full £3750 subsidy, whereas the Chinese battery supply of the Comfort Range model tested here condemns it to getting just £1500.

Which surely gives this particular model some pretty dim commercial prospects. It can tell us plenty about the C5 Aircross in general, mind you, and more than hint at the sort of car that we can expect the more important Long Range model to be.

This car belongs to the C-segment SUV ranks, lining up alongside the Nissan Qashqai or Ariya, the Skoda Karoq or Elroq and the Renault Symbioz or Scenic, depending on which kind of powertrain you want.

And while a mild-hybrid petrol model can be had from only a little over £30,000, an EV – a good-sized family car from an established European brand, with more than 400 miles of range, no less – can be snagged for less than £33,000.

The C5 Aircross's design is smarter, neater and tougher than was its predecessor's to these eyes. This is a big car for its class: more than 4.65m long in a niche where 4.5m is more typical, with a 565-litre boot no matter which version you buy (the Elroq has 470 litres). And with mild-hybrid petrol, plug-in hybrid and EV options to choose from, it caters to almost all comers.

The interior conforms to Citroën norms by being lounge-like, softly furnished and roomy. It's still only a five-seater, but there's plenty of space wherever you happen to be sitting. Citroën's trademark memory foam Advanced Comfort seats are certainly gentle on the backside and more supportive than the rather flat ones of the previous C5 Aircross. There's still no cushion extension for those up front, but the front seats on upper-tier models do get cushion inclination adjustment.

All models get a 13in, portrait-oriented, 'waterfall' touchscreen, which assumes responsibility for most of your secondary-level interactions with the car. There are useful physical shortcut buttons beneath to help with navigating it, thankfully, although you might not be too impressed with how it obstructs access to the cupholders and centre console storage area.

The lower-tier EV doesn't promise great things about how the higher-tier EV might drive. On our mixed test route, it fared okay but frustrated in some respects and underwhelmed in others.

Citroën makes most of the car's ADAS manageable enough but doesn't provide proper manual control of the regenerative braking, despite there being paddles to flap about rather pointlessly. Brake pedal progression is also quite ill-defined.

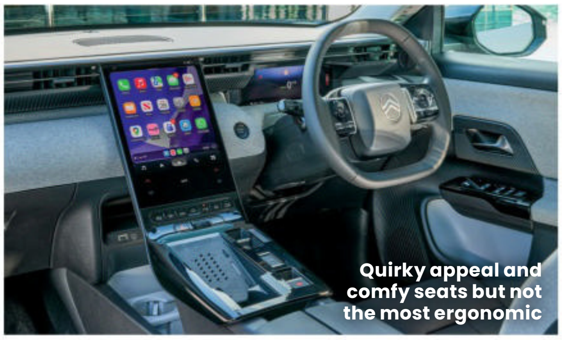
Performance is fine and ride isolation at low speeds is quite good, but out-of-town body control is soft and underdamped, with the suspension allowing the body to fidget and corkscrew gently yet persistently on country roads.

For real-world efficiency, on a circular route our test car managed only 3.1mpkWh – on which basis we would say the heavier-still 421-mile version could turn out to be capable of only 300 miles or so in typical British motoring.

The ë-C5 Aircross may look like Britain's new EV value champion on paper, but on this evidence it might just struggle to live up to expectations.

MATT SAUNDERS

Softness alone doesn't equal comfort, as C5 shows out of town



Quirky appeal and comfy seats but not the most ergonomic

TECH SPEC

CITROEN E-C5 AIRCROSS COMFORT RANGE PLUS

Practical and decent value but lacking efficiency, body control and the best EV drivability smarts

★★★☆☆

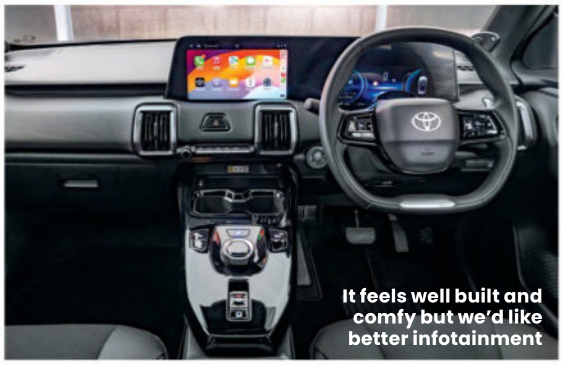
Price £35,205 (after Electric Car Grant)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 211bhp
Torque 253lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2109kg
0-62mph 8.9sec
Top speed 106mph
Battery 79.9/73.7kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 320 miles, 4.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals MG S5 EV, Renault Scenic, Skoda Elroq

TESTED 4.12.25, SUSSEX **DELIVERIES** NOW

TOYOTA URBAN CRUISER

Toyota's answer to the electric Ford Puma is a rebadged Suzuki eVitara

Chunky looks have hints of Land Cruiser; ride could be better



It feels well built and comfy but we'd like better infotainment

Recently Suzuki has borrowed some models from Toyota: both its Swace and Across were plain rebadgings (of the Corolla estate and RAV4). Now Suzuki has returned the favour, giving Toyota the eVitara to stick its badges on and provide a leg-up in the all-important small electric crossover segment.

From the outside, the Urban Cruiser is a butch thing, with a tall bonnet and beltline and slab sides. In fact, it looks like it could have been designed as a baby Land Cruiser, not a Suzuki. But step inside and you will wonder what's hidden behind all that metal, because the boot is just 238 litres, and while knee room in the back is good, head and foot room are not.

The 40/20/40-split folding seats do slide as standard, but even in their foremost position there's only 310 litres of luggage space behind, and you would barely fit a toddler in the back seats at that point. There is a little underfloor storage and the middle seat is usable, at least.

The front seats are comfortable and supportive and give you a good view out. Everything feels solidly assembled too. But it's a shame that there's so much gloss black on the centre console and around the infotainment and driver's display and that the cabin is all black whichever spec you go for. (Suzuki offers an attractive brown option.)

The touchscreen infotainment system feels unfinished. It's slow to respond, things that should be close to hand are buried in sub-menus and in the case of the speed limit bonger and heated seats an animation plays before you can adjust them.

One saving grace is the small row of physical buttons for stuff like the interior temperature and the digital driver's display, which is intuitive and pleasing to look at.

The ergonomics are poor too: the steering wheel is subtly offset to the left and doesn't have enough reach adjustment.

My mid-spec Design test car had 18in alloys, which gave it a great stance and still provided a chunky 55 profile, so it was surprising how wooden the ride felt, seesawing over expansion joints and crashing into potholes. It doesn't bode well for the 19s on the Excel model. The primary and secondary ride are both poor, the car often feeling oversprung and underdamped.

At motorway speeds the ride does improve and refinement is impressive for the class. However, indicated 2.3mpkWh efficiency over a mix of motorway, rural and town driving just isn't good enough and translates to fewer than 150 miles of range. It was 8deg C and rainy, but the Urban Cruiser comes with a standard heat pump across the range. Even if a short range doesn't bother you, you'll still be spending more on electricity than with a Ford Puma Gen-E or Skoda Elroq.

We would need more extended running to accurately gauge the efficiency, but unless the 49kWh model is more efficient, the usability of the smaller battery will be even more compromised.

With its various flaws, the Urban Cruiser is difficult to recommend. Competitive pricing may have compensated somewhat, but the essentially identical eVitara is nearly £4000 less, and a Citroën ë-C3 Aircross or Renault 4 is cheaper still.

In one of the most crowded segments of the market, the Urban Cruiser simply doesn't live up to the standard we expect from Toyota. It's a bit like your mate lending you their tux for an important work event, only to find they made it in their GCSE textiles class. It's not going to cut it, and if I were Toyota, I would be sending it straight back to Suzuki.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

TECH SPEC

TOYOTA URBAN CRUISER DESIGN

Sort out the efficiency and pricing and this would be an acceptable if unremarkable family car. Right now, there's little reason to consider it

★★⯪☆☆

Price £34,460
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 172bhp
Torque 142lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1800kg
0-62mph 8.7sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 61kWh (total)
Range, economy 265 miles, 4.1mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Ford Puma Gen-E, Kia EV3, Skoda Elroq

TESTER'S NOTE

The Suzuki eVitaras we've driven previously were similarly inefficient, so I have no reason to believe this was an issue specific to my Toyota test car. **AW**

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5790**

LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

New-era 'junior' Lambo has Ferrari squarely in its sights

MODEL TESTED
LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO
Price £259,570
Power 907bhp
Torque na
0-60mph 2.5sec
30-70mph 1.8sec
Top speed 213mph (claimed)
Average economy 18.9mpg
Electric range 6 miles
CO_2 emissions 272g/km
70-0mph 42.3m (14deg C, dry)

Picture 'a Lamborghini' and the brain drifts to visions of some vast V12-propelled supercar from another planet. The Sant'Agata flagships are monumental in both attitude and performance; in so many ways they embody the brand. But since 2003, the company's commercial bedrock has always been found elsewhere.

In recent times, the Urus SUV has taken up this critical role. These days, one in every two Lamborghinis is a Urus. But for nearly 20 years – since Audi took over – financial security was provided by a 'junior' supercar that combined 4WD with a sensational naturally aspirated V10 engine.

Some variations on this theme were far better than others but, broadly speaking, were it not for the combined efforts of the Gallardo and its progeny, the Huracán, there is a fair chance the world would be one Italian supercar maker poorer.

These cars democratised (we use the word loosely) the Lamborghini experience. In handling terms, they also took the fight to Ferrari and Porsche. By the time it bowed out with the RWD Tecnica in 2024, the Huracán could legitimately claim to be a finely honed driving tool – one that carried by far the most enthralling engine in the class.

But that engine is now dead, finished off by drive-by noise and emissions regulations. Its successor is the 'L411' twin-turbo V8, whose performance is boosted by a trio of e-motors. It spins to 10,000rpm. The car that houses this heady set-up is the new Temerario – understudy to the hulking, V12 hybrid Revuelto but, as we'll discover, to all intents and purposes no slower.

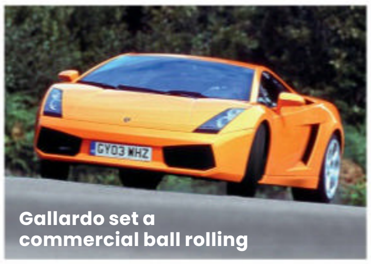
The Temerario joins the PHEV club, alongside the Ferrari 296 GTB and McLaren Artura. It is the most powerful of the three supercars and could be dynamite from a handling perspective, if the agility and poise of the Revuelto (which uses an identical layout) is anything to go by. Could Lamborghini, for the very first time, become the class leader?

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Huge power output; versatile driveline; new V8 feels 'motorsport'
CONS Far heavier than rivals; no more epic V10; design plays it safe

In 2022, spy photographers would have seen an unusual sight – an Aventador mule – leaving the factory gates at various times. It carried a prototype version of the Temerario's new heart, which is a 4.0-litre V8 assembled entirely in Sant'Agata (the old V10 was largely built in Hungary) and unrelated to anything else in the Volkswagen Group stable. It's an extraordinary powerplant for a 'mainstream' car and we explore its design in more detail on p31.



Gallardo set a commercial ball rolling

The salient facts are that it spins to five figures, is fitted with a pair of the largest turbochargers available for this kind of application and develops 789bhp on its own.

That it makes only 538lb ft isn't really a weakness, either. That's because sandwiched between the V8 and rear-mounted eight-speed dual-clutch transmission is one of three 148bhp axial-flux electric motors, ready to flood the rear wheels with plenty of twisting force at the mere flex of your right ankle.

The layout for the Temerario's powertrain – and much of its hardware, engine and rear-axle steering aside – is donated by the Revuelto. It means front-axle drive is supplied by two more of these axial-flux motors, one for each wheel. They weigh 15.5kg each, contributing roughly half of the 73kg the front axle adds. As well as speeding up an individual wheel, the motors can also slow them. As with the Revuelto, the tuning of this set-up is key to the Temerario's unique handling personality and startling agility.

It's a degree of agility that doesn't easily compute when you discover the weight of this car: 1905kg on our scales. That is 257kg more than the 296 GTB we weighed in 2022 and 353kg heavier than the Artura weighed the same year. Perhaps a fairer basis for comparison is Ferrari's SF90, which uses a similar tri-electric motor V8 set-up and has almost exactly the same footprint.

(As an aside, the Temerario is notably larger than its traditional rivals. Were you to chart today's supercars in side profile, like encyclopedias do with animals, the new Lambo would engulf both the 296 GTB and Artura. In fact, it is closer in length to the Revuelto.)

Alas, even the SF90 was 207kg lighter, so it's fair to conclude that the Lamborghini is overweight. A Revuelto is only 55kg heavier, despite its size and 6.5-litre V12.

The PHEV powertrain is surely to blame, because even using a carbonfibre tub would save the Temerario only 100kg or so. That powertrain sits in a new aluminium body-in-white with considerably fewer welds than the Huracán needed. It also has a 20% increase in torsional stiffness compared with the older car, which also benefited from carbonfibre bulkhead and floor panels. The Temerario does without these but does have an ultra-rigid transmission tunnel housing for the 1550mm-long, 3.8kWh battery that feeds/harvests from the e-motors.

As you'd expect in 2025, aero ▶

■ Alleggerita pack shaves off 25kg, not least through substantial carbonfibre panels towards the rear of the car. The engine cover, lifted off manually, is also in carbon and features artful aerodynamic vanes.

■ Exhaust tract for the 10,000rpm flat-crank V8 ends in a hexagonal outlet – and high. The rear of the car is complex, with no shortage of vanes and flicks and deep contours. Alleggerita cars get extra drama from their taller spoiler.

■ Temerario reprises the fang-style front bumper of the Huracán Performante, now with hexagonal LEDs just ahead of the radiator. The unit is hollow, allowing air through, and also houses a radar sensor.

■ Huge cutouts in the rear bumper expose 325-section Bridgestones. This sort of thing has become a Lamborghini design hallmark in recent times and is striking to say the least, with a docked-tail feel. Cars behind should keep well back.

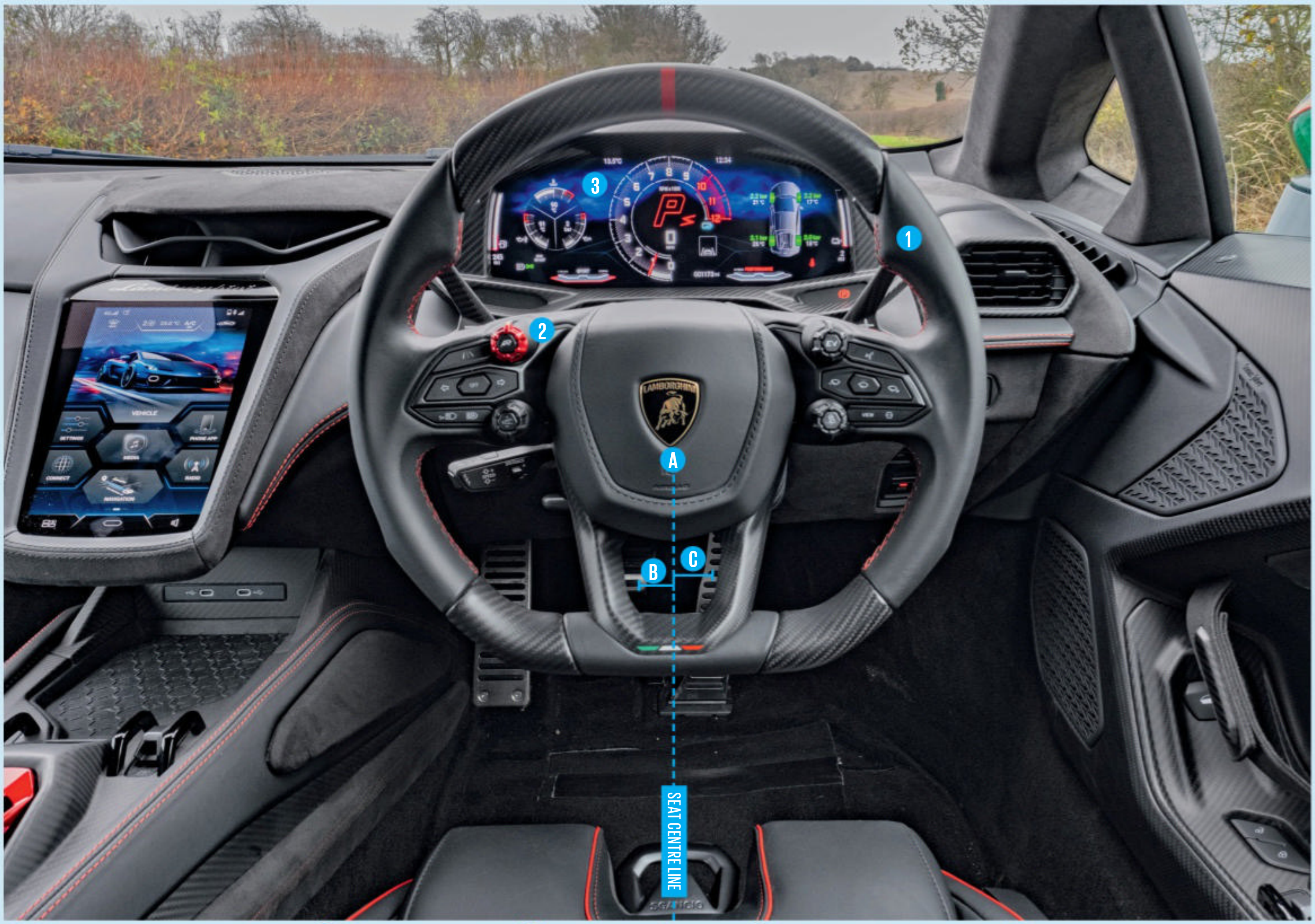
PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

① The rim is the same one you'll find in the Revuelto, though the carbon-leather finish costs extra. It's an excellent, firm, faintly arcade-like helm with comfy thumb grips and well-positioned paddles fixed to the widely adjustable column.

② Four rotary dials on the wheel are your gateway to the car's varied functionality. The red one takes you through the chassis modes, while top right is for powertrain. Bottom left is nose lift and damping force; bottom right, permitted yaw.

③ Instrument binnacle is a 12.3in digital affair. The huge tacho is a nice touch and you can easily scroll through flanking readouts using controls on the back of the wheel. It's all more intuitive than Ferrari's or McLaren's current efforts.

10
11
12
2.0 bar
2.1 bar
2



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 50mm left Ⓒ Accelerator offset 80mm right. Pedals are very much set up for left-foot braking, which you can do on the road because the top of the pedal isn't especially sharp. Driving position is Germanically well aligned.

◂ plays a key role in the Temerario's exterior design, which to our eyes isn't quite as compelling as that of later versions of the Huracán but can hardly be said to lack presence.

The hexagonal lights at each end of the car are hollow, with those on the tightly cropped tail helping to excavate hot air from the engine bay. At the front, air that does not hit the huge central radiator is channelled through a slot just above the tip of the bumper's 'fangs' and then diagonally up and out of an opening just beneath the headlights, smoothing the flow over the front wings and subsequently into the squared-off side intakes that feed the V8 and cool the carbon-ceramic brakes.

More extreme interpretations of the Temerario are on the way and the recently launched GT3-class racing version gives a flavour of what we can expect if the STO or Performante approach is applied.

For now, there is only the option of the Alleggerita package. It adds a more viciously raked rear spoiler in carbon, and carbon is also used for the engine cover (saving 9kg alone) and the rear wings. The front spoiler, skirts and substantial rear diffuser are also wrought in carbon, and the rear screen is Gorilla glass, typically used for phone screens. Inside, the pack brings carbon door cards and polycarbonate windows, plus carbon shell seats, for a total saving of just over 25kg.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Superb build quality; better ergonomics than the Huracán
CONS Paucity of storage persists

The driving position in the Huracán at times felt like a relic from Italian supercars of the '70s. The header rail was so low-flying that you couldn't pull right up to traffic lights, lest you hinder your view of them. The driving position was oddly perched too – on top of the jet fighter canopy, not within it.

The Temerario is much better in these respects without losing too much of the extraterrestrial 'wow' factor when you first drop aboard. It helps that the wheelbase is 40mm longer than the Huracán's, but that alone doesn't explain the full extent of the ergonomic improvements.

There has quite obviously been a reconsidering of the mounting for the seats, and the positioning of other architectural elements. Your hip point still feels higher than it might in an Artura or 911, but the driver is now more intuitively positioned relative to the dashboard and the arc of the severely raked windscreen. As a consequence, you instantly have more confidence when it comes to simply operating the Temerario. Visibility is also good by supercar standards, with large quarterlights. This is handy, given the car will demolish the quarter-mile dash in 10.0sec dead.

The Temerario's ability to do the basics neatly extends to the switchgear. All the important commands are given dedicated buttons and the dials, materials and weighting have a whiff of Audi's glory days of the late 2010s. Only the awkward placement of the indicator controls on the left-hand steering wheel pad will irk (presumably a stalk was thought to get in the way of the vast gearshift paddles?), though you soon get used to this.

The other side of this coin is that in putting all the meaningful controls on the steering wheel (those that control the dampers, powertrain, optional nose-lifter, headlights, lane keep assist and, on the back side, the infotainment commands), Lamborghini has made the Temerario exceedingly easy to operate on the fly. Which is just as well, because the central touchscreen is still no great pleasure to use.

From an aesthetic perspective, the cabin of our test car is on the spartan side, with dark Alcantara and a lot of optional carbon beyond what the Alleggerita package brings. You can go for something a lot warmer and flamboyant, particularly if you make use of Lamborghini's Ad Personam atelier. Full-leather interiors of green, tan and even turquoise are available.

So too is a Sonus Faber sound system that does a decent job of cutting through class-typical road roar. Another interesting option is the Vision pack, which features a trio of 4K cameras, integrated into a telemetry-gathering feature similar to Porsche's Track Precision app.

It would be no trouble at all to configure a Temerario with a greater sense of occasion than our test car. Any visual flair would be combined with a fair degree of comfort (rising further if you stuck with the standard Comfort seats, which can be heated and ventilated) and very high perceived quality.

Only the lack of oddment storage holds the Temerario back as a truly versatile proposition. There is a small net in the rear firewall (optional!) but there are no bins in the door cards and no armrest storage, only a small deck at the front of the centre console with two USB-C ports just ahead. It means that uncorking the car – as you surely will – can turn it into a snow globe of wallets, keys and other loose items. Be warned.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★⯪

PROS Staggering power, with a gearbox to match; mighty top end
CONS Engine's full scope is hard to enjoy; mid-rpm gearshifts; sound

It feels almost churlish to award the Temerario anything other than five stars when it comes to performance. Objectively, it is plainly outstanding, as evidenced by the 2.48sec 0-60mph time and ▸

TECHNICAL FOCUS: ENGINE

Now how on earth do you replace an engine as evocative and exciting as the shrieking 5.2-litre V10 in the Huracán? You can guarantee that Lamborghini – knowing only too well that the V10 was a pivotal factor in surely every Huracán buying decision – thought hard about the answer.

It has come up with an all-new V8 – one with a specific output far greater than that of the 6499cc V12 in the Revuelto, thanks to two enormous IHI turbos that sit within (above, strictly) the vee of the cylinder banks. The dry-sumped unit's peak of 789bhp at 9000-9750rpm also easily outguns the 631bhp at 8000rpm that the old V10 made in its fruitiest guise.

To achieve its headline 10,000rpm speed (9900rpm was the best we saw), the 'L411' uses a 180deg flat-plane crankshaft, titanium conrods and a head cast in the A357 aluminium often used for competition engines. An extremely rigid valvetrain that cycles on a very short chain then uses a finger-follower design with an 11,000rpm ceiling. Finger-followers are not unique in the supercar world and are found on current Ferraris and the Porsche 911 GT3 but are reserved for specialised products with high engine speeds.

Onto the back of the engine, and mounted to the crankshaft is one of the car's three axial-flux motors. At the front axle, these are critical to the torque vectoring and the car's handling character, but the one paired with the V8 engine is essentially there to offer torque-fill while the turbos spool to 2.5 bar.

The 'Lamborghini' scrawled across the cylinder head is also a nice touch, being reminiscent of the engines of bygone eras.

Elsewhere, Lamborghini says it has attempted, using particular engine mounts and exhaust design, to channel a crisp, fizzing sensory experience into the cabin – one redolent of race engines.

IN THE BOOT

Storage is not notably good in any of the current crop of supercars (Maserati MC20 and Chevrolet Corvette Z06 excepted, with their additional compartment behind the engine bay) but there is usually enough for a weekend away. The Temerario is no different in this respect, with 112 litres of storage in the frunk (10% or so more than the Huracán offered but less than the Ferrari 296 GTB or McLaren Artura) and a reasonably broad, usefully flat deck behind the seats that can just about take a couple of squished duffel bags without eating into the car's reasonably good rear visibility.

FRONT Leg room 1130mm, head room 950mm. Head room is better than in the Huracán. Leg room is also generous with the Sport seats.

REAR This deck is deep enough to take duffel bags if the passengers don't push their seats all the way back, which only the tallest need do.

BOOT Length 450mm, width 550-910mm, height 400-580mm. Charge cable bag eats into storage space but most owners won't travel with it.

“You will want to extend this engine. The final 1000rpm or so is purely for fireworks value”

◂ standing kilometre time of 18.0sec. These figures put the Temerario at the bleeding edge of combustion-based, series-production supercars.

The Ferrari SF90 – so similar to the Temerario in layout but even more powerful and priced in line with its status as a range-topping senior supercar – could go only 0.1sec quicker over the standing kilometre. Indeed, in this metric, the Temerario precisely matches our time for the Bugatti Veyron Super Sport. It is relentlessly, stomach-churningly quick, particularly to 100mph, by which point it is 0.2sec up on the 296 GTB and fully 1.2sec ahead of the flyweight Artura. Admittedly, the 819bhp 296 GTB, with its smaller frontal area and lower mass, hits harder once into triple figures. Remarkably, both cars recorded the same 0-190mph time of 19.5sec.

On the subject of numbers, we should mention tractability. Between 30-70mph in fourth, the Temerario isn’t quite a match for the 296 GTB but its time of 3.7sec is on a par with that of the new PHEV BMW M5 – a saloon whose middle name is ‘torque’.

So the Temerario is quick, but the subjective nature of its pace is more interesting and engaging still.

Nobody could expect this new V8 to exhibit the same unbridled joy and personality as the old V10, which was an absolute event. But even if you’re realistic about what the new engine is and is not, it can still feel a little lacklustre in the low and the mid-range of its scope.

Now, there is little wrong with the tip-in responsiveness of the powertrain, aided as it is by instant torque-fill from the electric motors. Neither is it devoid of its own personality, which in casual use amounts to a hollow, lean and cammy prattle that feels very racy and serious. It’s certainly not a boring engine and Lamborghini has mostly succeeded in giving it a proper naturally aspirated feel.

But equally, it comes alive only beyond 6000rpm or so. When you consider that hitting the 9900rpm (as tested) redline in second gear means reaching 86mph, you can see the problem. On the road, chances to really enjoy what this amazing motor can do will be fleeting. The same isn’t quite true of the 3.0-litre

MIRA
A HORIBA COMPANY
FIRST AID KIT

On MIRA’s weighbridge, test car was 1905kg – even with Alleggerita pack’s carbonfibre

It feels alert, rear driven and willing to rotate in corners in a natural, controllable fashion

TRACK ★★★★☆

PROS Torque-vectoring effects are broad and mostly natural in feel
CONS Heavy and occasionally slightly lacking in transparency

Lamborghinis, even track-focused ones such as the recent Huracán STO, have never been the first port of call for circuit junkies but they've nevertheless come a long way in the past decade or so.

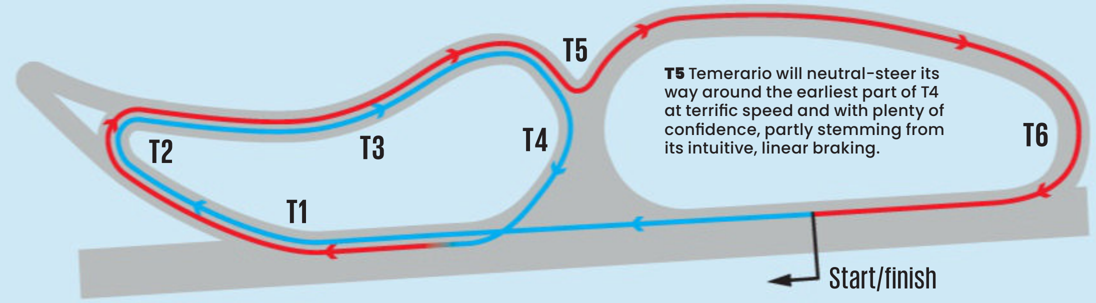
The Temerario appears to lay the ground for another step forward when it comes to making these extrovert supercars genuinely fulfilling track-day tools, but there are some caveats.

Let's start with the good bits. At high speeds, this is not an edgy supercar in any of its various stability control calibrations. Like anything with such a low polar moment of inertia, it's not exactly unspinnable, but it will devour fast transitions securely, and when it comes to teasing the tail out of line with committed trail-braking, the moment of yaw is well telegraphed and unfolds predictably. These elements allow you to push the Temerario, exploring the limits of yourself and the car.

Its various 'drift' modes are also useful if you don't want to disable the electronics entirely (as well you may not, given the mad speeds so easily achievable). These modes are not simply for showboating and can actually help you achieve a quicker lap while having more fun, much like Ferrari's vaunted CT Off mode. You can pick between 20, 30 or 40deg of permitted attitude, achievable both on the brakes and on the power, and with impressive fluidity. The car never does anything truly unexpected and equally, if you want to keep it locked down and less expressive, you can stick with Corsa mode. You'll want to dial up Performance mode for the powertrain, beyond the softer Hybrid and all-electric Citta.

Ultimately, the car seems to work more predictably with the electronics on than off. And its weight becomes more apparent as you get deeper into the realm of true limit handling. For now, the Temerario can excite on track, but it will never satisfy like an Artura can.

HORIBA MIRA HANDLING AND STABILITY CIRCUIT



T5 Temerario will neutral-steer its way around the earliest part of T4 at terrific speed and with plenty of confidence, partly stemming from its intuitive, linear braking.

T2 Tight hairpin is where supercars can bite and the Temerario's appetite for rotation feels novel in a Lamborghini. Novel, and very welcome indeed.

T6 This is a fast-in, fast-out parabolica that can expose cars that don't have a fundamentally good handling balance. The Temerario's nose pushes less than any Huracán's did but still isn't quite as true as a 296 GTB's.

V6 in the 296 GTB, which has a rich musicality about it from 3000rpm.

But trust us when we say you will want to extend this engine. R&D chief Rouven Mohr admits that peak power could arrive earlier than it does and that the final 1000rpm or so is purely for fireworks value. Beyond 7000rpm, the intake note thickens into an almost painfully waspish rasp and at first you have to repeatedly will yourself not to pull for an upshift, such is the head room in crank speed. You could honestly be forgiven for believing this engine was indeed naturally aspirated, such is the alacrity with which it spins at its highest heights. It is more rev hungry than even the Revuelto's V12, which of course is naturally aspirated. A purely rear-driven track-day version of the Temerario, with this engine but carrying 300kg less weight, is a pretty mesmerising prospect.

Elsewhere, the dual-clutch 'box, transversely mounted behind the engine and supplied by Dana Graziano (it's the same unit as in the Revuelto), is stellar both on the way up and down. Our only complaint is that, in certain modes, you can get a fairly vicious serving of manufactured driveline shunt on uplifts in the mid-range – enough to unsettle the chassis in the damp.

Finally, braking. Considering that Lamborghini has chosen to integrate regenerative front-axle retardation into the pedal, linearity is good and it's easy to sensitise your left foot (the pedal box suggests you use your left) and deftly brush speed off when the need arises. The pedal is also satisfactorily firm once you're into the meat of the action.

However, feedback is thin, which can make gauging grip quite tricky. Outright stopping distances were also only adequate at Horiba MIRA. The Temerario needed 42.3m to stop from 70mph on its Bridgestone Potenza Sport tyres. The best cars of this kind are now dipping beneath the 40m mark. The Revuelto was similar to the Temerario in this way. That said, once below 50mph, both cars haul up as rapidly as the best.

RIDE & HANDLING ★★★★☆

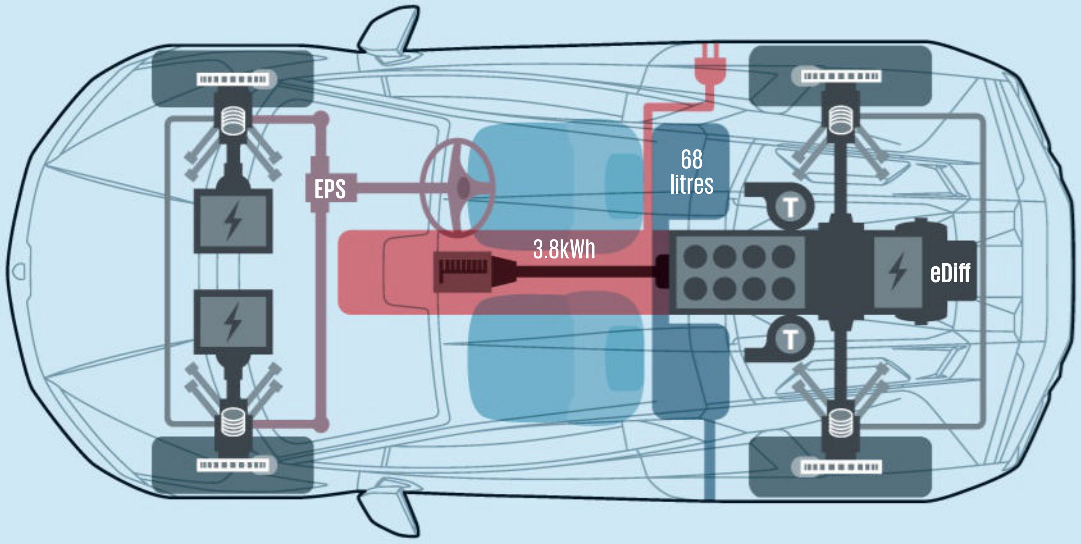
PROS Fun-loving, cohesive and a new benchmark for the brand
CONS Traces of hyperactivity; steering feedback; can't always hide its mass

The Temerario is a fascinating car from a handling perspective. It would be all too easy to drive it at six- or seven-tenths and chalk it up as a reasonably well balanced but faintly flat-footed supercar that goes where you point it, and at great speed, but lacks some inspiration.

Fortunately, there is rather more to the Temerario, though you need to go looking for it because, at a mere canter, this car doesn't have the elegance of the 296 GTB or the delectable filigree communication skills and accuracy of the Artura. Its steady-state cornering balance has a hint of front-axle push about it and the quick steering is aloof. You need to be 'doing' something with ▸

The amount of yaw is up to your steering and right foot and/or drift setting choices

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION



LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

On-the-road price £259,570
Price as tested £417,406
Value after 3yrs/36k miles na
Typical PCP £2250 pcm (£60,000 deposit + 23 months/10,000 miles)
Insurance group 50E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Carbon-ceramic brake discs, magnetorheological dampers, Drift Mode, cruise control, 8.4in TFT touchscreen with full TFT cockpit display, Android Auto/Apple CarPlay, Bridgestone Potenza Sport tyres, navigation system, TPMS
Selected options Verde Mercurius paint £19,128, Alleggerita package with livery £63,780, Rosso-painted calipers £1536, Velador forged alloys £3732, Sport seats £6588, Sonus Faber sound system £5208, passenger display £3192, steering wheel in carbon and leather £3192, nose-lift system £3192, tailpipes in matt black £852

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Mid, longitudinal, 4WD
Type V8, 3995cc, twin-turbo, petrol; 789bhp at 9000-9750rpm, 538lb ft at 4000-7000rpm
Motor Two 148bhp axial-flux motors (front), plus 148bhp axial-flux motor (rear)
Battery type Lithium ion
Capacity 3.8kWh (total)
Voltage 395V
Total power 907bhp
Total torque na

TECHNICAL LAYOUT

Unlike the V12 Revuelto and certain rivals, the Temerario does not use a carbonfibre monocoque, Lamborghini instead employing an aluminium construction with a number of hollow castings. For the first time, there is no mechanical connection between axles: the V8 drives only the rear.

Power to weight (dry) 537bhp per tonne
Torque to weight na

GEARBOX

Type 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Ratio spread 5.23-1.019
rpm in top at 70/80mph 2133/2437

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Aluminium spaceframe, aluminium body
Weight (dry)/as tested 1690kg/1905kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 44%/56%
Drag coefficient na
Wheels 9.0Jx20in (f), 11.5Jx21in (r)
Tyres 255/35 ZR20 (f), 325/30 ZR21 (r), Bridgestone Potenza Sport
Spare None
Fuel tank 68 litres (behind seats; filler on nearside rear wing)

SUSPENSION

Front and rear Double wishbones, coil springs, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type EPAS, rack and pinion
Turns lock to lock 2.5
Turning circle 12.0m

BRAKES

Front 410mm ventilated carbon-ceramic discs, 10-piston calipers
Rear 390mm ventilated carbon-ceramic discs, four-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Passive measures Dual-stage driver airbags, adaptive passenger airbag, side head-thorax airbags, inertia reel seatbelts, ABS, EBD, ASER, ESC
Active measures ALDW, RCTA (optional), ACC (optional), AEB (optional), FIA (optional)

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 272g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £1601/£3201

V8
ORDINE DI ACCENSIONE
15374826

◂ it, because it's the transitional phases in which this complex road-racer of a supercar comes alive.

On a committed run, corner entry is where you begin to realise the Temerario is an order of magnitude more initially responsive and malleable than the Huracán was. You don't have to be trail-braking like crazy for the chassis to want to pivot into bends, aided by the torque-vectoring front axle. This can occasionally border on feeling synthetic, but mostly the car just feels hyper-alert and ready to play. The quick adoption of cornering attitude invites you to pick up the throttle early. Do so with zeal and the car feels very rear-driven indeed and able to be truly steered on the throttle with some – or a lot of – yaw. You could drive RWD versions of the Huracán like this but they tended to be the rarefied ones and you needed to know the car extremely well. In the Temerario, oversteer comes so easily, naturally and catchably. In Sport, the car feels 95% rear-driven, with the straightening effects of the front axle parsed out with a deliberate thrift. Along with the angry energy of the V8 at higher revs, it's a massively exciting car. Implicit in this is the fact that the Temerario's weight is concealed well. Well, but not entirely. Accurate and agile as this car is, it often feels innately big-boned.

Meanwhile, pliancy is good in either the 'soft' or 'firm' windows of operation for the magnetorheological dampers, which control double wishbones at both ends of the chassis. In the softer mode, the Temerario can't quite summon the languid ease of a 296 GTB set to Bumpy Road mode, but it's not far off and doesn't feel overwrought in the slightest. Neither does it tramline or bump-steer or exhibit any other less predictable traits you wouldn't want in a car with more than 900bhp. Lamborghini deserves credit for engineering such a wildly quick car that has the under-wheel security to be enjoyed in most conditions while keeping the front Bridgestones down to a sensible width of 255mm.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★☆☆

PROS Base price presents good value for the huge performance
CONS Very expensive after options; thirsty at a cruise; meagre EV range

There will be some apprehension in Sant'Agata regarding the fortunes of the Temerario. In commercial terms, neither Ferrari nor McLaren have had it easy with the respective launches of their first mainstream plug-in hybrid supercars.

Unlikely to help is the fact that the new model is considerably more expensive than its predecessor. When the Huracán Tecnica arrived in 2022, it was £50,000 cheaper than the Temerario's starting price of £259,000 (exactly on a par with the 296 GTB). Options will swell that figure and our test car, decked out with plenty of carbonfibre and the £63,780 Alleggerita package, comes in at nearly £420,000. Yes, this is a press car so is more generous in its specification than is typical, but that is a staggering sum for a car in the same class as an Artura.

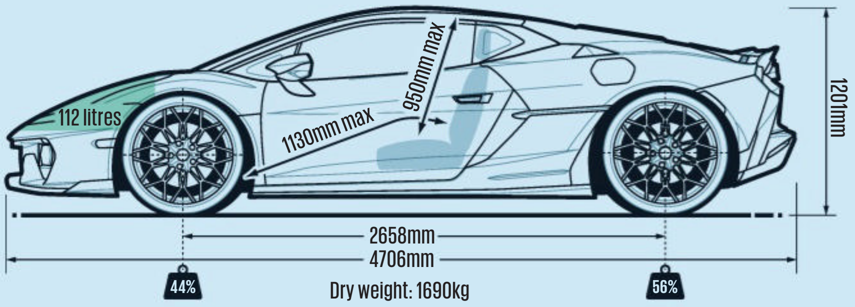
But is that true? Lamborghini would argue the Temerario, with its class-busting footprint and Revuelto-aping tri-motor powertrain, sits in its own bubble. It's a reasonable point. As we've seen, the performance is hypercar-esque, and the 10,000rpm V8 really is a unique proposition, especially when key rivals are now down to six cylinders. The V10 may be dead, but Lamborghinis still have the most bombastic powertrains going.

And perhaps the thirstiest. We test the economy of PHEVs with the drive battery as depleted as possible. In this way, the Temerario recorded a touring economy of 24.8mpg, which trails the Artura (27.2mpg) and 296 GTB (37.8mpg). It also has the smallest electric range of the three, amounting to six miles or so in real-world use. Of course, that's more than enough to get you into or out of an environment subtly, should you desire. You enter EV mode at the push of a button. ▸

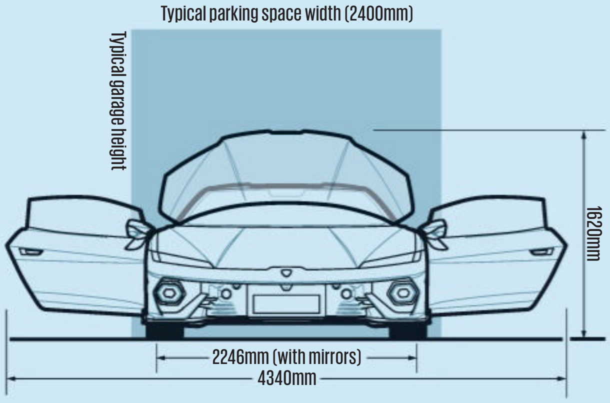
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4706mm **Width** 2246mm/1996mm (with/without mirrors)
Height 1201mm **Door span** 4340mm **Max height to open bonnet** 1620mm

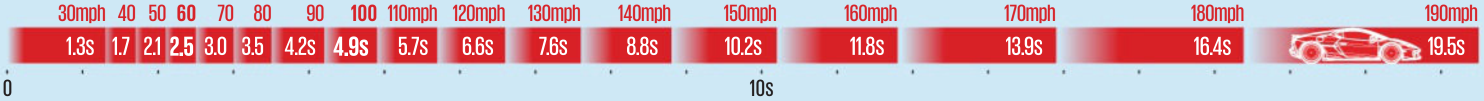


PARKING

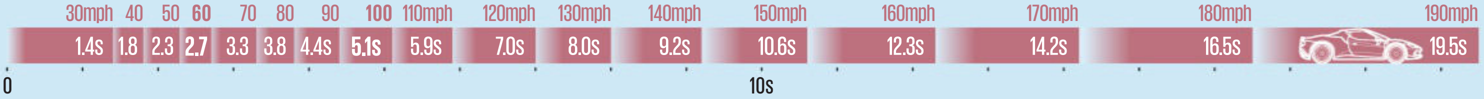


ACCELERATION

Test conditions 14deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 10.0sec at 147.2mph **Standing km** 18.0sec at 184.5mph **30-70mph** 1.8sec **30-70mph in fourth** 3.7sec **0-62mph** 2.6sec

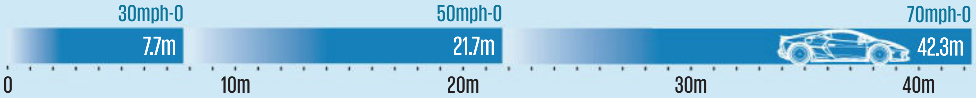


Ferrari 296 GTB (2022, 14deg C, dry)
Standing quarter mile 10.2sec at 147.2mph **Standing km** 18.1sec at 185.4mph **30-70mph** 1.9sec **50-80mph** 1.5sec

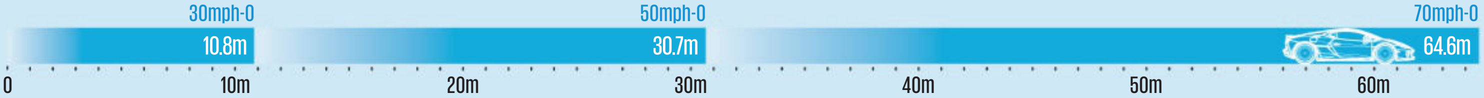


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.34sec



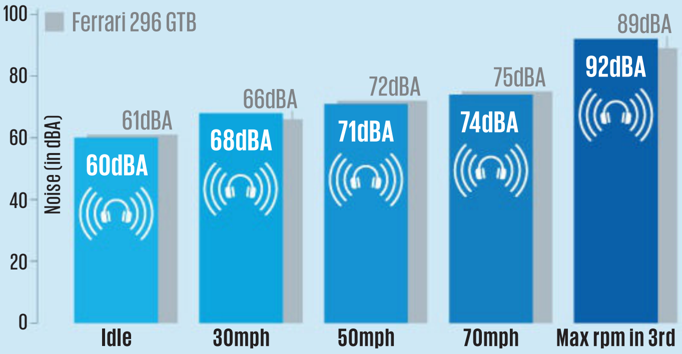
Wet 60-0mph 3.35sec



ACCELERATION IN GEAR

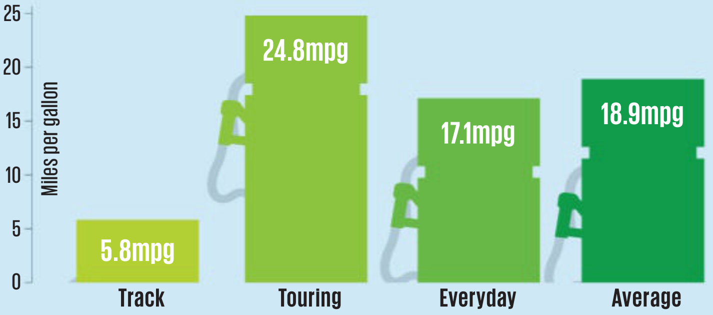
mph	Time (sec)						
	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
20-40	1.2	1.6					
30-50	1.1	1.5	2.0	2.3			
40-60	1.0	1.3	1.9	2.3	2.7	3.1	
50-70	1.0	1.2	1.7	2.1	2.7	3.1	4.5
60-80	1.1	1.2	1.6	2.0	2.6	3.0	4.9
70-90		1.3	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.9	5.0
80-100		1.4	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.8	5.0
90-110		1.7	1.7	2.0	2.5	2.9	5.0
100-120			1.8	2.0	2.6	2.9	4.9
110-130			2.0	2.1	2.7	3.1	4.9
120-140			2.3	2.3	2.8	3.3	5.3
130-150				2.5	3.1	3.5	5.9

CABIN NOISE



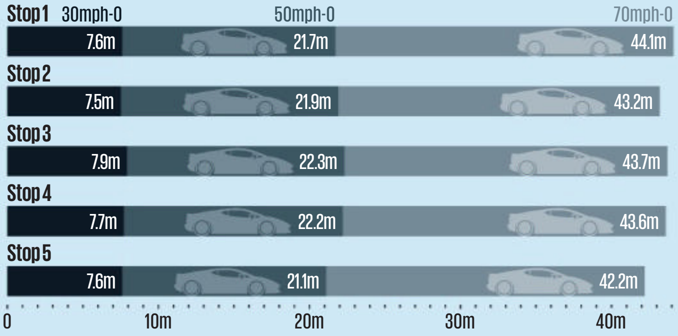
RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 25.2mpg (combined) **Test range** 283/371/256 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** 6 miles



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -1.9m



THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

PETER LIDDIARD

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
There's a secret party mode designed purely for standing starts. Quickly shift from the brake to full throttle in Corsa ESC Off mode and the car will safely light up its rears for maximum theatre. The engineers devised this for the treacherously narrow start at the Goodwood FoS.

MATT SAUNDERS
The dial for damping firmness – there are two settings – is an essential tool but is extremely easy to miss. Find the little nose-lift button on the wheel and it's the roundel on that. I like to have the ESC in Sport, with softer damping.

SPEC ADVICE

Potential for optional spend is predictably vast, especially with carbonfibre. Only you can decide what's best in that respect, though in a car this heavy you need to accept that the result will be entirely stylistic.

In terms of usability, good things to have are the nose lift, the matrix headlights and the Full High Assistant pack, adding adaptive cruise control.

As for the Alleggerita pack, we'd keep our powder dry and wait for a proper STO or Performante-style Temerario derivative.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Chase a chunk of mass out of the car.
- Calibrate the braking and steering for more granular feedback.
- More cabin storage.
- Make the engine bay prettier – a 10,000rpm V8 deserves it, no?

RANKING RIVALS

1

FERRARI 296 GTB

£259,575

★★★★★

Ferrari is readying an update for what can dubiously be described as its 'entry-level' supercar, but it's hardly needed. Several years on from its launch, this V6-electric powertrain remains the pick of the class when it comes to linearity and romance, and it endows the rear-driven 296 with straight-line performance that the box-fresh, four-wheel-drive Temerario can only just surpass. It's married to an astonishingly fluid, exploitable chassis. It is the quintessential modern supercar and deservedly heads this list.

Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Motor Synchronous axial flux, gearbox-mounted
Total power 819bhp
Total torque na
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Dry weight 1470kg
0-62mph 2.9sec
Top speed 205mph
Economy 44.1mpg
Electric range 15 miles
CO_2 149g/km

2

PORSCHE 911 GT3 TOURING

£158,200

★★★★½

In terms of performance and mechanical layout, a mere 911 looks rather out of place here among fire-breathing mid-engined alternatives. But to discount the GT3 Touring because it has only 503bhp would be to cheat yourself out of perhaps the most transparent driving experience of any mainstream high-performance car currently on sale. The handling is grittily engaging and invites – and rewards – commitment, while the 9000rpm flat six is one of the great engines, ever. It comes in manual too.

Engine 6 cyls horizontally opposed, 3996cc, petrol
Power 503bhp at 9000rpm
Torque 332bhp at 6250rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight 1477kg
0-62mph 3.4sec
Top speed 193mph
Economy 20.5mpg
CO_2 312g/km

3

McLAREN ARTURA

£201,400

★★★★½

The fact that a car with the transparency and clinical brilliance of the Artura is only our third-favourite supercar of the moment highlights how high the standards are at the top of the class. There are aspects in which the British car is better than direct rivals – steering feel, driving position and the absence of weight chief among them. It offers a filigree driving experience that dials the driver into the handling like little else. If the V6 sounded a touch sweet, and the chassis could be made to play more easily, it'd be higher.

Engine V6, 2993cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Motor Synchronous axial flux, gearbox-mounted
Total power 691bhp
Total torque 531lb ft
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight 1498kg
0-62mph 3.0sec
Top speed 205mph
Economy 58.9mpg
Electric range 21 miles
CO_2 108g/km

4

LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

5

CHEVROLET CORVETTE Z06

£182,920

★★★★☆

With a firecracker of a V8 and an ambitious chassis that takes on the leading powers of the track-ready supercar niche head on, the Z06 feels like it explores every shred of potential that the C8's mid-engined layout has brought. It's dynamically capable enough to take absolutely no prisoners and it's as captivating and special to drive as any fast Corvette so far. But it is heavy compared with its European equivalents. This catches up with the car on tougher surfaces and in limit-handling moments. Brilliantly fun, mind.

Engine V8, 5463cc, petrol
Power 640bhp at 8550rpm
Torque 460lb ft at 6300rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight 1714kg
0-62mph 3.1sec
Top speed 195mph
Economy 17.1mpg
CO_2 377g/km

6

MASERATI MCPURA

£209,930

★★★★☆

In the face of sluggish MC20 sales, Maserati has updated the car and given it a rebrand. Fundamentally, this remains something of an underrated supercar, combining a silken gait with a bomb of an engine that flings this carbon-tubbed chassis forward at an eye-watering rate. It doesn't rank higher here because of its weight, which in our experience is quite a bit heavier than claimed, and the lack of detailed feedback in the sometimes woolly steering and brake pedal responses. But it's still hugely charismatic.

Engine V6, 2992cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Power 621bhp at 7500rpm
Torque 538lb ft at 3000rpm
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic
Dry weight 1475kg
0-62mph 2.9sec
Top speed 202mph
Economy 24.1mpg
CO_2 254g/km

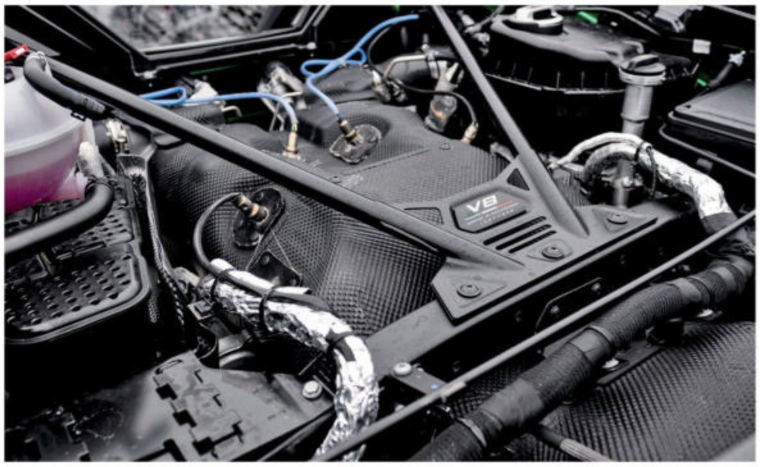
VERDICT

Road-racer spirit infuses an outrageous technical tour de force

★★★★☆

In several respects the Temerario can be deemed a stunning achievement. It carries an all-new engine with a truly competition-grade rev ceiling; its thrillingly agile handling has a devilish sense of humour and approachability about it; it has markedly better cockpit ergonomics than its Huracán forebear; and its hybrid integration is slick. As with the Revuelto, cockpit quality has also risen to match and in several ways exceed that achieved by any rival. And then there is the mind-warping performance, which is on a par with the Revuelto and marks the wild new frontier for supercars at this level.

That being said, the stratospheric heights of the V8 can be challenging to explore on the road. The Temerario is also too heavy, sometimes lacking the easy fluidity and communicative transparency of key rivals at times when you don't have a dagger between your teeth. Even so, what an event this car is. The Huracán's V10 will be sorely missed, but the dynamism of this new chassis goes a very long way to filling the void.



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RICHARD LANE

Testing, testing

ZF
ZF Steer-by-Wire
SEE > THINK > ACT

ZF's new steering method felt good in BMW prototype

I hate to break it to anybody already ruing the demise of throttle cables and hydraulic brake lines, but the steering column is the next bit of connective mechanical tissue up for the chop.

Last week I interrupted our road test of the invigorating new Toyota Aygo X to join some ZF engineers at MIRA. They were in a modified G30 5 Series (with rare cloth seats – how delicious). Fitted to the car was a new steer-by-wire system already serving in Nio's Chinese-market ET9 but due to appear in at least one senior Mercedes next year. It captures the driver's inputs with a steering wheel actuator, which then informs another mechatronic actuator on the front axle, turning the wheels the desired amount.

In reciprocation, torque sensors on the axle send a signal back to the steering wheel module. There that signal is translated into force by two worm drives that work independently around a single worm wheel, recreating load and, yes, even granular feedback. It's simple but, as ever, stupidly clever. It's the second drive, which acts with or against its twin, that's especially neat.

Asked if I wanted to have a go, I was only too happy to oblige – for journalism, sure, but also for pure petrolhead curiosity. The last car I drove with steer-by-wire was a 2013 Infiniti Q50, which was hardly an exemplar of fizzing feedback.

You may wonder why we need this technology. There are good reasons, according to ZF ride and handling specialist Duncan Church and his colleague Adam Heenan, an expert in active vehicle systems. Both engineers have worked in steering since the advent of electromechanical (EPAS) systems and insist that the by-wire approach isn't a fresh start but something that builds on more than a decade of EPAS learnings. They reckon that, because of the way in which these systems work, when it comes to what can loosely be defined as feel, there's actually a smaller difference between EPAS and by-wire than exists between fully hydraulic and EPAS.

> **"Its by-wire steering recreates load and, yes, even feedback"**

Crash safety is a big benefit. No intermediate shaft (as engineers call the column) waiting to be rammed back into the cabin in an accident is a good thing. With no physical connection between front axle and steering wheel, by-wire systems also remove the potential for thumb-snapping kickback. Equally, they can nullify undesirable kickback in normal driving.

Massively adaptive ratios are another reason why car makers are courting steer-by-wire. Cars are getting bigger and cities busier. Having a quick ratio at low speeds and a more languid one on open roads is clearly useful. It could change with a car's drive modes too. Delicate calibration of this stuff will be essential, of course, but this kind of versatility isn't really possible with EPAS. Your SUV could serve up 180deg lock to lock.

With by-wire you can also fold or even stow the steering wheel in the dash – useful for sleeping in a 4x4, or if your car is one day driving itself.

The wheel won't whip this way and that during automated parking, too – instead neatly remaining 'dormant'. Steering columns also transmit noise and vibration into the cabin; car makers have got good at mitigating this but the ability to totally nullify will undoubtedly please S-Class engineers. On a similar note, far fewer engineering compromises will need to be made to change the side of the steering wheel by market. Vehicle assembly is also simpler. And you can, of course, use the same hardware with a different state of tune for a vast variety of applications, so there are obvious economies for the modern manufacturer haemorrhaging cash.

So what does it feel like? The G30? Beautifully balanced, as ever. And the steering? Actually, surprisingly intuitive. Church and Heenan allowed me to try a 'Comfort' map. I wouldn't want it on my weekend McLaren but, for the purposes of an everyday car, it was perfectly accurate and judiciously weighted. Nothing at all screamed 'video game controller'. Crucially, the initial response was intuitive and pretty natural.

From his laptop, Heenan then summoned up a sportier map – one with similar weight to before but more road-surface feedback. The difference was subtle but subtle was all that was needed. The faintly thin two-dimensionality of the Comfort map was more or less addressed and there was enough information – gathered at ground level and conveyed faithfully yet digitally to my hands – for me to confidently carve through damp off-camber bends at pace and lean on the car.

I'd say it was 90% convincing – which, given the beigeness of most EPAS, is all it needs to be.

161 BMW
YH21 FMW

Things that make you go M

Can today’s M2 CS hold its head up against two icons of BMW’s M car lineage? **MATT SAUNDERS** musters an M5 CS and M3 CSL to find out

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

The new M2 CS is a special kind of fast BMW. Well, it certainly seems that way to me, if not quite to the other judges of our Britain's Best Driver's Car shootout, which you might have read recently (Autocar, 19 November). On that score, little more by way of autopsy seems necessary. Democracy can be cruel – as BBDC history has proven time and again for BMW M cars. A combination of 'Cup' tyres and changeable weather can be crueller still.

My suspicion is that if all five judges had spent as much time in the M2 CS as I did, driving it up to and back from the Lake District so many hundreds of miles in better conditions as well as bad ones, it would have ranked higher. Or, to put it another way, I think it deserves another chance at some glory. And this is it.

Today, the M2 CS meets a couple of cars that show exactly what it takes to earn a place among the M car immortals. In such company, we'll find out just how special this car's particular brand of 'Competition Sport' really is. We've got all the light that an early winter's day can provide and, in addition to the new M2 in which we drive away from BMW UK's Hampshire headquarters at a fresh-feeling 7.45am, we've got a four-year-old 'F90' M5 CS to take with us, plus a 22-year-old 'E46' M3 CSL. This shouldn't be your average Monday.

The M5 represents the last time BMW produced genuinely spectacular results with the CS suffix, and it's the first – and as yet only – time it has been used on an M5. And the M3 CSL? Well, it would probably give both the original M1 and the 'E9' CSL 'Batmobile' a pretty stiff challenge for the title of most celebrated M car of all time.

If you happen to find £150,000 of used banknotes stuffed in your Christmas stocking this year (it would certainly beat a satsuma), you could take your pick. That amount would get you a very nice M3 CSL, a mid-ranking M5 CS or a fully loaded, new M2 CS – with enough change to build a garage in which to keep it.

The newbie would be considerably the easiest of the three to come by. E46 CSLs typically only come onto the market in twos and threes; F90 CSs appear even more seldomly, which actually reflects their rarity.

UK registration data has it that there are fewer than 300 E46 CSLs left, after a supply peak of a little over 350 UK-registered examples a couple of years after the completion of the car's 2003 production run. Not many, then. But there have never been more than 50 extra-special M5 CSs on the DVLA's books (it was a £141,000 car, after all). If you want hen's-teeth-collectible, the bigger car is actually the more obvious place to seek it out.

And what if you just want those extra-special, weight-saving touches? Well, what we're surveying before us here is M division's first experiment of the modern era into that kind of crash-diet engineering, alongside its very latest and what is perhaps its most deliciously ornate. In that respect, I think the M5 gives the E46 a run for its money.

The CSL's lightweight composite front bumper does in fact look like something of an experiment. There's an almost basic, motorsport-level sense of lashed-up visual purpose about its naked carbonfibre front splitter vanes and that improvised-looking extra circular ram air intake. The car has an aluminium bonnet, probably because carbonfibre composite tooling wasn't up to making a panel like that in 2003; it has glassfibre composite bucket seats – no doubt for the same reason; and it has steel brakes. ▸

It was, though, the first BMW with a carbonfibre roof, which, together with the forged alloy wheels, some lightweight glazing and myriad smaller weight-saving efforts elsewhere, meant it weighed 110kg less than a regular, automated-manual E46 M3 coupé: 1385kg in total. Not featherweight but pretty sprightly. The M5 CS's weight-saving didn't achieve as much. It was 70kg lighter than a regular M5 Competition, although we still weighed one, in full running order, at a whacking great 1940kg in 2021.

But the crash-diet efforts are even more wonderful to admire here. This car's 'gold-bronze' forged wheels are utterly gorgeous, and the sculpted, naked carbonfibre underside of its vented bonnet, which has 'M5 CS' written down its spine, is ready to take your breath away every time you lift it up.

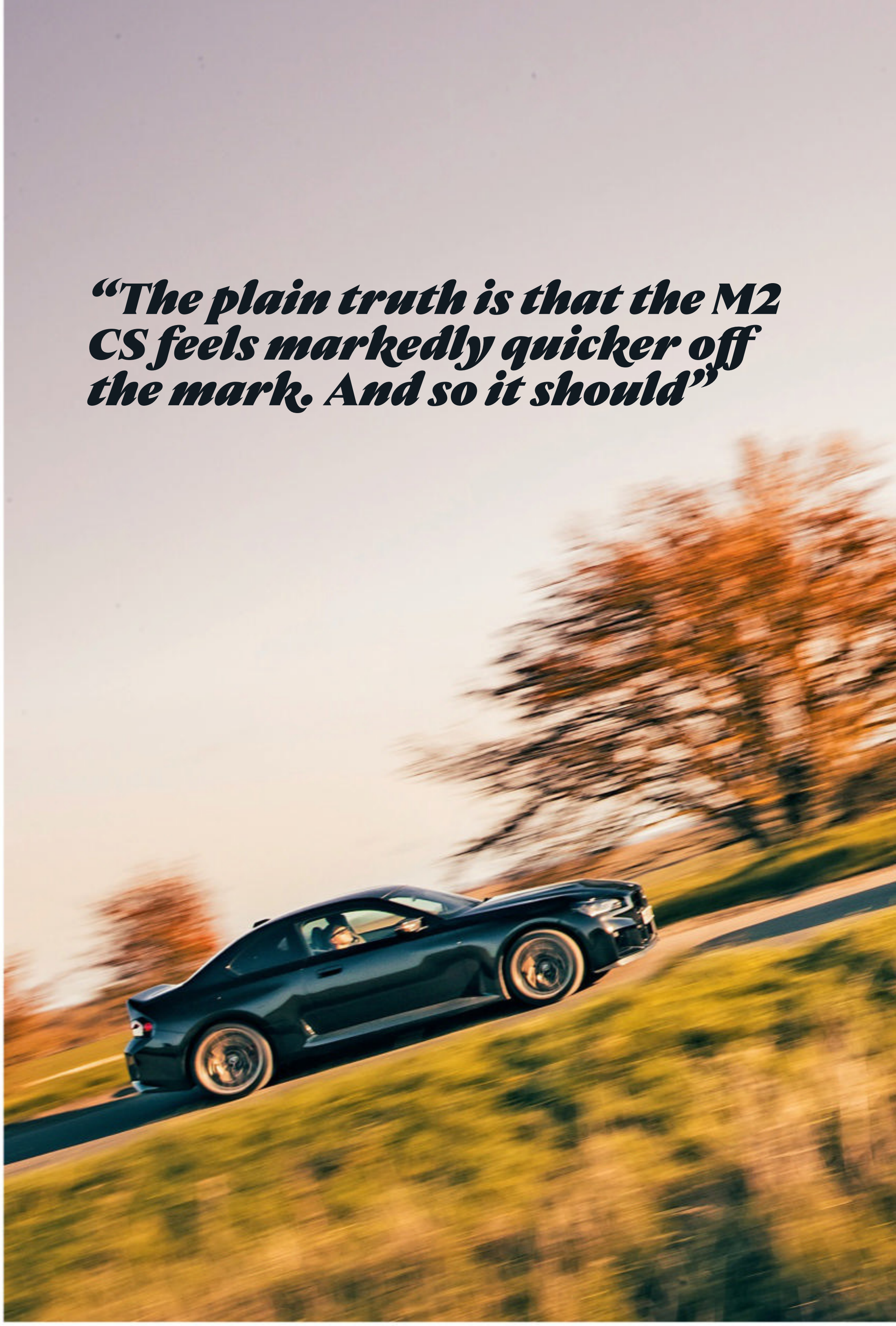
The M2 CS has a carbonfibre roof too, not to mention that rather adorable CFRP ducktail bootlid, which so clearly apes the CSL's rounder lightweight steel equivalent. Gold-bronze forged wheels, together with the weight-saving in the cabin, bring it in some 30kg lighter than a regular M2 auto, at 1700kg on the button. You can lighten it still via optional carbon-ceramic brakes (which the M5 CS got as standard and so figure in its homologated kerb weight while the M2's clearly don't – if you're keeping score) and a special dealer-fit M Performance lightweight exhaust. At that weight, you can appreciate why customers might want to make it even lighter. Assuming those tweaks got it to 1675kg, it would still be a heavy special-series compact M car, wouldn't it? Respectable, though – just about.

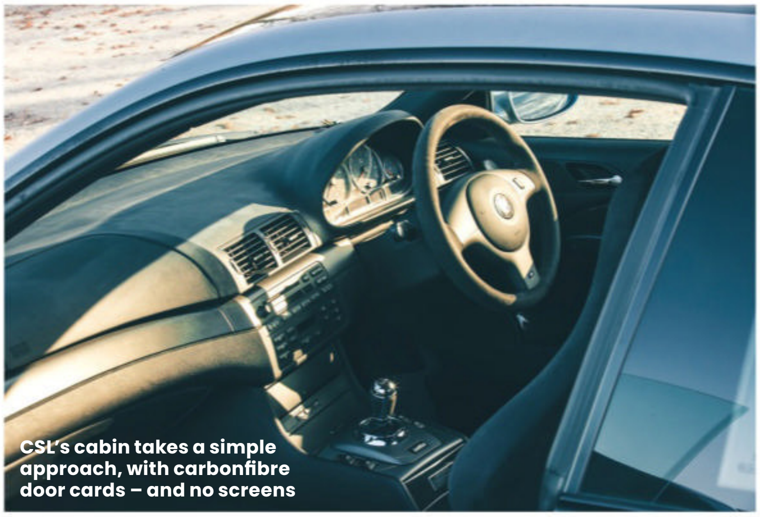
The car's carbonfibre buckets are supposed to be near enough identical to those of the M5 CS. Funny thing is, getting from one driver's seat to the other, they don't feel that way. The M5's driving position is absolutely perfect: low and arrow-straight, with abundant room at the controls; in the M2 you're similarly low, but the car's offset pedal positioning sets a challenge for the articulation of your right ankle, while the steep cushion bolsters dig you in the thigh if you try to mitigate the problem any other way.

The M2's Alcantara steering wheel feels slightly oversized compared with the M5's, and it isn't quite as easy to pass it through your hands. Even so, it grants a better driving position than you will find in the CSL, whose fixed-backrest bucket feels perched up compared with the other cars, while its steering wheel is more raked.

What redeems the CSL is just how much more single-minded an interior it has. It's from a time before BMW's totemic infotainment displays, Excel-spreadsheet drive-mode configuration screens and ambient lighting foreplay. Those beautifully sparse carbonfibre door cards and lightweight grab handles come from a place

> ***"The plain truth is that the M2 CS feels markedly quicker off the mark. And so it should"***





CSL's cabin takes a simple approach, with carbonfibre door cards – and no screens

M5 CS's driving position is spot on, but the tech takeover is under way

of purity and simplicity that Garching can no longer inhabit. It has physical buttons to adjust the gearbox's shift speed, to slacken the stability control (or, separately, turn it off completely) and to sharpen the accelerator pedal's response. That's it. It's not a car that makes you worry that you've simply got it set up all wrong, and it doesn't bong at you at all. Instead, it roars, howls and screams.

Which brings us to driving experiences – what we came for, ostensibly. Under the circumstances, it might be unreasonable to expect this M2 to beat two of the most feted and fetishised M cars of the past 25 years for outright driver appeal. But can it level with them? Can it compete, or get into the conversation, even?

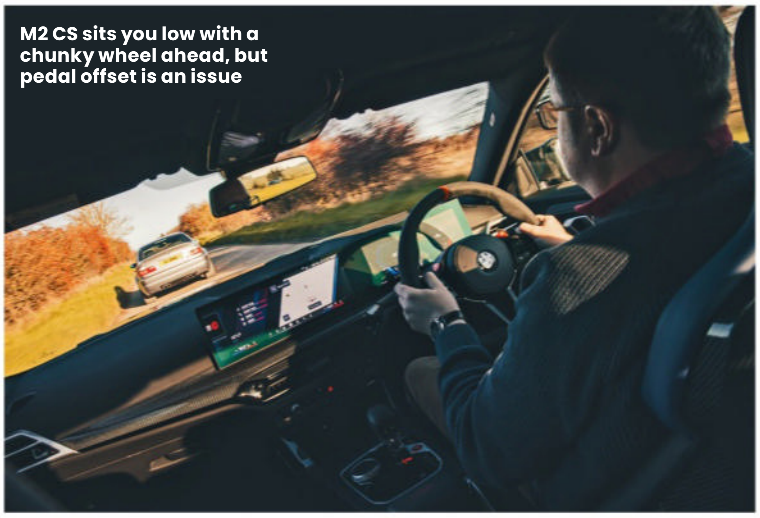
I think it can. The truth is, the CSL is a car from a different dimension built entirely for the wild, unfiltered rawness of its atmospheric six-cylinder engine, the sledgehammer savagery of its automated manual gearbox and the connected feel of its drum-tight ride. The M5 CS, meanwhile, does feel studiously modern, yet it has damping and wheel control that seems almost supernatural for something of its size and weight. Thanks to that free-revving 626bhp V8 and fully switchable four-wheel drive, it also has a character that can swing from assured 'bahn-storming sophisticate to tyre-bonfiring, sideways-at-any-speed, hot-rod hooligan at the press of a button and dab of your toe – but it is never anything short of sublime. Its dynamic range is genuinely staggering, and its capacity to inspire your confidence, flatter your skill level and indulge your whim is absolutely unmatched by any super-saloon in this tester's experience.

But there are echoes of both cars in what the M2 CS does on the road and how you can enjoy and deploy it. They are suggestions – tributes, if you like – that make for a car with a flavour of both of the M car grandees.

No modern M car snarls and thrashes quite like an E46 CSL. Don't forget, it had BMW's much-loved 'S54' 3.2-litre straight six in its very rarest, fiercest road-legal form. You warm it through carefully, after which every stab of throttle produces such an orchestral crescendo of mechanical noise and chatter that it makes you wonder, and not so idly, when the last time its lubricant levels might have been checked.

When you unleash it, there isn't Herculean poke. Its 273lb ft needs almost 5000rpm wound on for it to actually materialise, and the crankshaft needs to spin all the way to 7900rpm for the engine to produce its 355bhp peak. The plain truth is that the M2 CS feels markedly quicker off the mark. And so it should.

But the CSL just sounds – and indeed acts – so damn fast. It thrives on revs and transforms itself around you the harder you go. Beyond ▸



M2 CS sits you low with a chunky wheel ahead, but pedal offset is an issue

Both M5 and M2 are adept at managing their greater mass

◂ 6000rpm it's loosening your dental fillings and fizzing through your elbows like some small, distant hammer drill. I'm not sure I've yet driven another road car engine, short of an Italian-built atmospheric V12, that sounds and feels like it's working as hard. It just makes you wonder: if modern powertrain engineers, with today's turbochargers and combustion control systems, only had the emissions requirements of 2003 to restrict them, how much power could they reliably get out of a 3.0-litre straight six? Perhaps 650bhp? Maybe 700? More? Answers on a postcard, please; I'd love to know.

The M2's stiffened engine mounts give it a suggestion of the CSL's outright rawness, but it really is only a hint. It's enough to lift it, though, to take it out of the realm of the ordinary and make you feel better connected to it. And I suspect that M Performance exhaust would bridge the gap a bit further.

The tautness of the CS's ride, lowered and stiffened as it is, is comparable to the CSL's. Ultimately, the E46 feels firmer, shorter and leaner over a challenging road, and it's even better controlled and more uncompromising in its damping. But the CS carries its additional bulk and weight rather well, with hints of the adaptively controlled voodoo that the M5 CS uses to disguise nearly two tonnes of heft and keep it so unerringly well connected to terra firma.

Then there's the way, or the ways, the three cars corner. There's an unexpected sleepiness of off-centre steering response to the CSL. Today's performance cars have been made so darty and agile, reined in and saved from themselves as they are by modern electronics. I had to double check that the CSL did indeed get a speedier steering rack than a normal M3, along with a wider front axle track, because, by modern standards, it doesn't dart like the M2 CS.

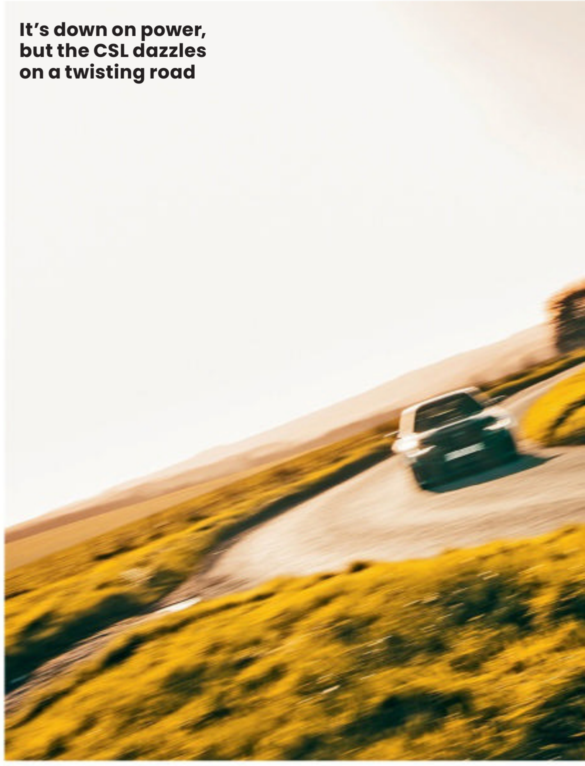
But that doesn't mean there isn't wonderful precision, fluency and balance about the way the E46 turns in. It guides you towards the apex, giving you supreme confidence to attack as hard as you dare – which, frankly, you need to do if you want any change from those chunky Michelin rear tyres, with only a Golf GTI's worth of torque to throw at them.

Get brave and the CSL responds with amazing progressiveness and delicacy. The harder you drive it, the more polished it feels. Wildness meets subtlety, and effort and commitment are superbly rewarded. It's magical stuff.

You simply don't need to drive either of the modern CSs nearly so hard to bring them to life on the road. In contrast to the CSL, the M5 CS feels hilariously over-endowed. Stick it in rear-drive, DSC-off mode and show it more than two-thirds power through a third-gear corner and it will smear its Pirelli Corsas into a gloriously benign slide, which is yours to develop or tidy up as you see fit. Leave it in four-wheel-drive mode and you can just enjoy the tactility, accuracy and positivity of the steering instead as you wait for a clear road on which to uncork that incredible V8.

And the M2 CS? It's got enough of the M5's outright grunt and rampant handling adjustability to make it feel fast, vivacious and accessibly entertaining on a mix of drives and types of roads, and it comes in a package closer to the CSL's for compactness, wieldiness and threadability. Genuinely, it's at least close to a best-of-both-worlds situation.

I would change it, if I could, with a bit more vocal presence from the engine, a set of straighter-set pedals and a skinnier, slightly smaller steering rim but very little else. As it is, it isn't quite the ultimate modern M car, but it's a damned good one – and, actually, it's got nothing to fear from the bigger boys. ▣



It's down on power, but the CSL dazzles on a twisting road

Electronic controls help give the M2 CS greater agility

Switchable all-wheel drive gives the M5 CS a broad repertoire

2ND **Perhaps the best M5 there has ever been; quite possibly the best super-saloon of all. Does it all, from extravagant rear-drive hooliganism to tactile feel.**

> *"Get brave and the CSL responds with amazing progressiveness"*

FIRST IN LINE: THE CSL REMEMBERED

Stunt driver and friend of Autocar Mauro Calo, who drove on our test, was one of the first people to drive an E46 CSL on UK roads: it was he who got the job of driving a left-hand-drive press car over to Autocar's London offices, 22 years ago, for our very first report.

"I had done one European driving job for Autocar at the time," says Calo, "and just as I'd finished and road test editor Ben Oliver was thanking me for doing it, he asked me if I could do another the week after.

Calo (left) first drove the E46 CSL in 2003

"I got the last flight to Munich one weekday evening, then a taxi from the airport to Garching to collect the car. I drove it back to the UK through the night, stopping only to fuel it and to catch the first ferry from Calais.

"I couldn't believe my luck. It felt like such a special car, and I was driving it on incredible roads. I remember leaving the autobahn slip road at Munich and merging behind an Aston Martin DB9, which at the time was still a very new car itself. The two of us chased each other down this derestricted stretch of autobahn, way beyond 100mph, for mile after mile.

"My first rest was on the ferry from Calais, really; I remember handing the car over to the road test team at Autocar's Teddington offices mid-morning. It was the one used in David Vivian's August first drive report (Autocar, 12 August 2003), and the performance numbers were done at Millbrook. The full road test that appeared a few weeks later was done on a right-hand-drive car, though.

"Funny thing was, when Autocar was through with the early LHD car, I had to drive it back to Munich the week after. I didn't mind! It was – and still is – a sensational thing."

	BMW M3 CSL	BMW M5 CS	BMW M2 CS
Rating	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★½
Price	£58,455 (2003)	£140,780 (2021)	£92,475
Engine	6 cyls in line, 3246cc, petrol	V8, 4395cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol	6 cyls in line, 2993cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol
Power	355bhp at 7900rpm	626bhp at 6000rpm	523bhp at 6250rpm
Torque	273lb ft at 4900rpm	553lb ft at 1800-5600rpm	479lb ft at 2750-5730rpm
Gearbox	6-spd automated manual, RWD	8-spd automatic, 4WD	8-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight	1385kg	1825kg	1700kg
0-62mph	4.9sec	3.0sec	3.8sec
Top speed	155mph	190mph	188mph
Fuel tank	63 litres	68 litres	52 litres
Economy	23.7mpg (NEDC)	25.0mpg	28.2mpg
CO$_2$, tax band	na	256g/km, 37%	226g/km, 37%

3RD M2 falls slightly short of the big guns for combustive presence and dynamic star quality. But for a brand-new baby M car at a five-figure price, it's very impressive indeed.

1ST CSL remains the high-water mark in its exalted performance car lineage for spine-tingling rawness, drama and excitement. Vivid and wild yet brilliantly polished on the limit.

The art of the reveal

The prospect of a new car debut might not set your heart racing, but manufacturers take them very seriously. CHARLIE MARTIN peers behind the scenes

You may find yourself living in a shotgun shack; you may find yourself in another part of the world; you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile; and you may find yourself in a stuffy photo studio waiting for the reveal of a new car; and you may ask yourself: "How did I get here?"

No, you're not David Byrne, frontman of new wave group Talking Heads (for those who may have missed the lyrical reference), but a motoring journalist on a car launch. It's 5.30am and your alarm is blaring from across the room. You're in a strange hotel somewhere on the outskirts of Paris, trying to will yourself into forward movement so that you have time to get some caffeine into your system before the shuttle bus takes you to the launch venue.

So how did you find yourself here? Well, behind every issue of Autocar lies a spreadsheet detailing every new car unveiling: what model it is, when and where the launch is taking place, who's going and when we're allowed to talk about it. Co-ordinating the news section of the magazine, website and social media feeds is a complex spider's web of organisation, ruled by those competent enough to distribute the boots-on-the-ground legwork of those such as myself.

For Autocar, the reveal is the static unveiling of a new model (either at a private preview or a public event); the launch is when we get to drive that model, and those come a while later.

Once a journalist's name has been assigned to an event, there follows an email from the relevant car firm's PR department asking for passport details, dietary requirements (I'll eat anything, thanks) and whether we'd like airport parking (yes, please). It's all elementary stuff, but it's necessary in order to get to the fun part.

Prior to the event, there will be a conversation within the editorial team about the nature of the event: which executives will be present to probe for news, what 'hook' we'll hang the story off and what opportunities there might be for gathering fun clips for social media.

We'll be mulling it all during the flight to the event, daydreaming about the Oscar we'll win for slamming a few car doors and videoing the tinny clinks they make. By the time we're at the hotel, fed and ready to turn in, it's close to midnight.

By 8am, we're on location at a studio somewhere else on the outskirts of Paris, trying not to think about all the near-misses we witnessed from the back of a minibus as it fought its way through the rush-hour traffic.

Proceedings kick off with a bit of downtime before the main press conference. Typically, journalists of different nationalities mingle ▸

◂ with each other – forming cliques not unlike those you'll remember from school – while some opt to open their laptops, typing with one hand and tucking into a pastry with the other. There's just about time to fire off some emails before we shuffle into the main room for a press conference, greeted by a who's who of, in this case, senior Renault executives, who are about to show us the new Twingo. This bit, again, feels like being back at school, sat bolt-upright on a slightly uncomfortable bench paying great attention to the headmaster; today it's design boss Laurens van den Acker.

In a welcome change of pace from the usual, van den Acker beckons us up to walk us around the car and explain the big details. He's especially proud of how Renault managed to keep the concept's main details intact while paying reverence to the car's realistic use cases, joking that the plain plastic pieces on the flanks of the front and rear bumpers are perfect for Parisian attitudes to parking.

A barrage of interviews follow – a 'round table' for us and rival publications to probe van den Acker and team about the car, which almost becomes a game of trying to get the best question in. The goal is to bring more to the story than simply the materials we're given, be it a good anecdote about the car's development, a comment on what it brings to the market or, ideally, a scoop on the next model to follow.

Interviews and product demos complete, it's time to write the story while waiting for our designated slot to film one of three cars in an adjacent room. By the time we've transcribed the key quotes and written a draft, about an hour has passed, but we've got another two to wait until filming time. Just as well, because we've got to write different versions of the story for the magazine and for the website, with the latter typically requiring fettling to ensure it appears in search engine results and the like. This is also a great opportunity to think of follow-up pieces, such as 'op-eds' about the wider market context or additional news gathered in interviews.

Finally, we're corralled into a separate room for filming one of three cars, all in different colours. We opt for the yellow, owing to it standing out best on camera, and fly around it with our phone recording the various different noises it makes. This tends to take only 15 minutes or so, but it goes on to attract almost one million views on social media.

Before the day really has a chance to slow down, we're back on the plane to Blighty. It's Friday night and everything is already filed, and it feels like a job well done. As we drift off for a nap, we sign off with the grown-ups at the office and begin to think about next week: another country and another few thousand words ready to be written. And so it goes.

> *"The goal is to bring more to the story than simply the materials we're given"*

Car reveal venues vary; outdoor events can be more exciting

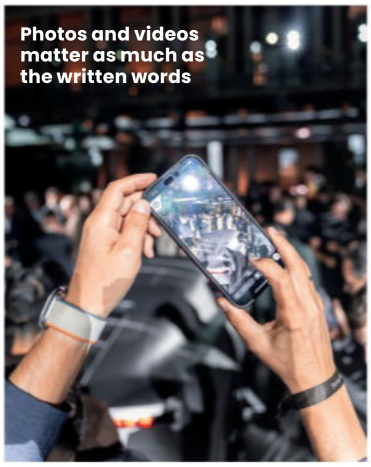
OUR LASTING LAUNCH MEMORIES

Celebrities would occasionally pop up at car launches, but it's less common these days – and anyway, I care little for such things. With two exceptions: one, the reveal of the Brazilian-market three-door Volkswagen Gol at the São Paulo motor show in 2012, when footballer Neymar was bussed in. I've never seen anyone more mobbed: this was Indian cricket levels of fandom. And, speaking of cricket, Sir Jimmy Anderson, my absolute hero, was at the launch of some Range Rover facelift in London a few years ago (pictured). I was genuinely star-struck and could barely mumble a word, so I went full cringe for a rather terrible photo with him. He must have thought I was a right plonker, but he was a lovely fella.
MARK TISSHAW

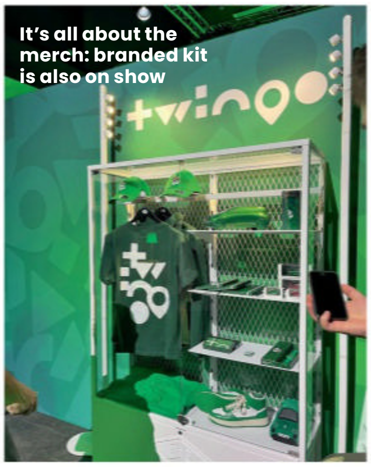
In 2018, I was in freezing Detroit for the motor show, British Airways had lost my bag, so I wasn't appropriately dressed, and there I found myself at the new Mercedes-Benz G-Class reveal with none other than Arnold Schwarzenegger, who had been employed (or perhaps promised a free G) to awkwardly 'interview' Mercedes' then CEO in front of an audience of media and the like. An industry peer with more chutzpah than me not-so-subtly took a photo of us with Arnie in the background. And no, I can't find it.
RACHEL BURGESS

The New Mercedes-Benz G-C

Proud parents show off their baby: Laurens van den Acker reveals new Renault Twingo



Photos and videos matter as much as the written words



It's all about the merch: branded kit is also on show

DO CAR REVEALS MATTER? AN INSIDER REVEALS ALL

Car reveals are important for the media, but what do the car firms themselves hope to get out of them? We asked Jim Holder, Renault UK's director of communications – and someone who has seen launches from both sides of the fence, having previously been Autocar's editorial director – to explain.

What do you hope to gain from car reveals that you couldn't get from simply issuing a press release and some photos?
"Deeper coverage, conveyed with authenticity and quality. To help the best media tell the best stories and bring life and depth to them, time with the car and the people who made it is critical.

"That's most obvious on video and social media, because the people or titles creating it tend to have a personality that they want to bring to the screen. But it's also true of printed or online media, which can use a reveal to get deeper stories that convey their – and our – expertise, give a first-hand impression of a car and tell the human stories behind it."

How far ahead are such events planned, and how complex is the co-ordination between the central PR team and the various national arms?
"Early planning starts at least a year out but, as with most big events, it starts to crystallise a few months ahead. The HQ team will organise the event, and then a few months ahead it's down to each country's PR department to pitch for which media they want to invite.

"The tension comes because media have to be very efficient with their time these days, so we need to prioritise time with our experts, plus filming and photography time."

How do you decide where and how to do an event, and what challenges do they present?
"Renault is a proudly French company, so if it's a case of bringing the audience to the car, then the majority of our reveals are done in Paris for practical and emotional reasons.

"The exception is motor shows, when the audience comes to the car. Even then, before most motor shows we'll do an embargoed pre-reveal so the media can have its in-depth coverage ready.

"You might ask why the media would then bother to attend the motor show. In truth, some don't – but for those who want the most depth and the most insight, this is the chance to meet all the company experts, from quizzing the CEO to discussing the nuances of a bonnet line with the designer who created the first clay model."

How do you measure and judge a return for it all?
"There are formal metrics: volume of coverage, value of coverage, share of voice and more. As you can imagine, there are industries built on measuring the value and plenty of comparisons against past benchmarks, other countries and rival car makers.

"But I'm also a great believer in instinct. On a country level, I know if we've got the most from an event or not – or, at least, the media will tell you, sometimes quite bluntly…"

You would be forgiven for not knowing about the Mullen Five RS. The American EV start-up presented its '1000bhp, 200mph' super-crossover at CES last year with a weird, panto-style play featuring various important historical figures, which would have been perplexing enough, had Abraham Lincoln's enthusiastic exit from the passenger side not prompted the door mirror to fall off – in front of a crowd of hundreds. It did little for Mullen's credibility, and the firm has yet to launch a car.
FELIX PAGE

The importance of the Lamborghini Urus SUV in helping grow the Italian firm was such that the launch was held in the brand-new factory building constructed specifically for its production in Sant'Agata Bolognese. With the Italian prime minister on hand, quite the show was organised, including a performance by a series of factory robots' arms 'dancing' in sync. And then, midway through the slightly overblown performance, everything stopped, due to a power cut. Eventually, then Lambo boss Stefano Domenicali stepped forward, apologised and beckoned for the Urus to be pushed onto the darkened stage by hand.
JAMES ATTWOOD

I walk into a warehouse with 100 or so others, and on the stage is footballing legend Eric Cantona. He's humming while pretending to read – and continues this for 10 minutes. It is very weird, and I'm about a foot away from him. He then leaps to attention and raves about the new Ford Capri before power posing on a rear wheel for pictures. Magnifique.
WILL RIMELL

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Road Test Yearbook 2025

What a year! Among the £9.2m of machinery we road tested, there was everything from a 217mph EV to a 3140kg 4x4. Relive every one of them

January

AUTOCAR
NEW CARS 2025

AUTOCAR
NEW BMW M5 vs PORSCHE

AUTOCAR
ULTIMATE DEFENDER

AUTOCAR
ULTIMATE 4x4s

JANUARY OPENED AS it traditionally does on the pages of Autocar: with a look ahead to all the headline-making new cars expected in the coming year.

It can be interesting as a road tester to look back at the cars that we were so hotly anticipating back then and are still waiting to deliver verdicts on today – the Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale and Ford Mustang GTD, for example – and wonder whether their makers are just being coy, or worse. In both of those cases, at least, we hope to rectify the situation in early 2026.

January is when voting for the much desired Car of the Year award comes to a head and editor Mark Tisshaw and I reported on a meeting at Silverstone to drive the competition's shortlisted cars on UK roads. It was clear to us, even then, that Renault was about to have a memorable year with its accomplished 5 supermini. In the end, it scooped the gong by more than 60 clear points from the runner-up Kia EV3.

It was an important month for comparison tests. In our 15 January issue, the box-fresh, hybrid-powered BMW M5 met the Porsche Panamera Turbo E-Hybrid and duly confirmed that its big technological powertrain shift has brought some challenges and weaknesses with it. I remember very clearly how much bigger and heavier that M5 felt than its German rival and how much more enticing the Porsche's relatively supple, easy-going ride and handling were. The Panamera won the day at a canter.

Two weeks later, as the month drew to a close, a rather different comparison test occupied our cover. The arrival of the new, J250-generation Toyota Land Cruiser was our cue to spend a happy couple of days in a quarry in Rutland, getting very muddy indeed.

The Toyota's competition was made up of the toughest off-roaders we could gather: the Ineos Grenadier and the short-wheelbase Land Rover Defender. And how interesting it was to find out which of the trio shrugged

Quote of the month

"Most men tend to sit far too far back [when driving a supercar]," Christian Vann, PalmerSport's chief instructor, tells me. Outstretched legs don't provide optimal power from your quads when braking and, in a crash, your legs will go through your pelvis."
Murray Scullion

Saunders was "just a little bit awestruck" by the mighty Octa

8 January **No 5716**

MINI ACEMAN SE EXCLUSIVE

★★★⯪☆

Usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal

Price £38,500
Price as tested £41,600
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
30-70mph 5.7sec
Weighted average charging rate 70kW
Maximum rear leg room 710mm

15 January **No 5717**

AUDI S5 SALOON LAUNCH EDITION

★★★★☆

Well-rounded sports saloon with driver appeal

Price £68,525
Price as tested £68,525
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 4.1sec
70-0mph 46.6m (10deg C, slightly damp)
Cabin noise at 50mph 63dBA

15 January **No 5718**

BMW ALPINA B3 GT TOURING

★★★★⯪

Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will do down as one of the all-time greats

Price £90,400
Price as tested £105,315
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 3.3sec
Touring test economy 29.4mpg
Weight distribution as tested (f/r) 51%/49%

22 January **No 5719**

PORSCHE PANAMERA 4 E-HYBRID

★★★★☆

Understated PHEV is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon

Price £91,000
Price as tested £129,413
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
30-70mph 2.4sec
Electric test range 29 miles
Weight as tested 2370kg

BMW M5's swap to PHEV power blunted its core appeal for us

off the deepest mud and steepest ascents easiest – and which had the broadest dual-purpose, on- and off-road capabilities. The Toyota impressed Matt Prior and me with its sheer toughness and appetite for punishment. The Ineos, while characterful, struggled a bit with its size and weight. But the Defender was the test's crowning glory: all but unstoppable off road and amazingly well mannered on it.

That special off-roaders issue also brought us a fantastic buying guide on used 4x4s to suit budgets from £1000 to £30,000, as well as Matt Prior's take on why he likes green-laning so much. Elsewhere during the month, we delivered first verdicts on the Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally, Land Rover Defender Octa and Mercedes-AMG G63. So however quickly and noisily you like to tackle a loose surface, Autocar provided well for you.

Meanwhile, for those with different preferences, we visited Gordon Murray Automotive for a look around its Windlesham headquarters, and Murray Scullion took some expert instruction – and not from Autocar road testers, I hastily add, but PalmerSport's chief instructor – on how to get the best out of a supercar on a track day.

MATT SAUNDERS

MOMENT TO FORGET

911 Carrera GTS 'confetti'

The road test of the Porsche 911 Carrera GTS was on an excruciatingly tight turnaround, so when things got biblical on the day of the photoshoot, we just had to get on with it. From a driving perspective, the car was actually fine. Something like a 911 GT3 would have been very nervy indeed but the GTS coped with standing water well. Until, that is, I caught sight of two bits of black confetti in the rear-view mirror. The brake-cooling aero cladding for one of the rear suspension links had left the building, presumably caught by a gush of water. Cue me stopping in the pouring rain and fishing plastic out of an enormous puddle. Fair play to Porsche: one of its techs reattached the part with cable ties and off to MIRA we went to record the telemetry, where the car hauled up from 70mph in a sensational 38.9m, then rattled off the five consecutive stops constituting our fade test with a variance of just 30cm. **RL**

Latest Land Cruiser jumped for joy until a Defender beat it

Prior and Cropley rode in GMA T50

Vann gives Scullion supercar tips

22 January No 5720

MG ZS HYBRID+ TROPHY

★★★☆☆

Roomier, cleverer and better equipped than you would expect for the money

Price £24,495

Price as tested £25,040

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Maximum boot height 860mm

Braking endurance +3.4m (fade)

Everyday test economy 57.7mpg

29 January No 5721

BMW M5 SALOON

★★★½☆

A technical leap, though into troubling territory

Price £111,350

Price as tested £133,275

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 3.5sec

Standing quarter mile 11.5sec at 128.0mph

50-70mph in 4th gear 1.8sec

Electric test range 35 miles

29 January No 5722

SKODA OCTAVIA ESTATE vRS

★★★★☆

A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger

Price £39,775

Price as tested £41,570

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Touring test economy 37.6mpg

30-70mph 4.8sec

Max boot length (to front seats) 1790mm

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Anglesey track night

Mazda MX-5. Anglesey. January. At night. I was taking part in the "world's first unlit night-time track day", organised by Mission Motorsport. It was epic. Everyone was well behaved, it was so dry that I managed to get the roof down and the driving was fabulously tricky. Getting round a circuit you don't know with only the lights of the car in front to guide you is a bucket-list thing for people who enjoy a challenge. **MSc**

February

SCOOP TOYOTA'S SPORTS CAR FUTURE

AUTOCAR
HOT 911 GT3 RATED
NEW PORSCHE
Prior: "No one else makes a car like this"
NEW PANDA: COOL, FUN, BRILLIANT

SCOOP NEW FIAT 500 & PANDA

AUTOCAR
USED SPECIAL
30 DREAM CARS
...for under £30k
AUDI'S MEGA NEW ESTATE RATED

HOW BMW WILL MAKE EVs FUN

AUTOCAR
FROM SMALL CARS TO HYPERCARS...
21 NEW MERCS
You think of it, they're going to make it
WHY BASIC MACAN IS BEST

IS THIS THE WORLD'S BEST 4x4?

AUTOCAR
AMAZING ALPINE vs EVERY RIVAL
Hatches so hot you won't miss the engine
SCOOP
NEW R8: BACK WITH A V8

Alpine A290 and Mika Meon show EVs are getting lighter and more fun to drive

THE FUN CAR can at times feel like an endangered species, but February displayed a variety of valiant conservation efforts.

One approach involves ears, fingers and a loud LALALALALA and the Porsche 911 GT3 continues as it always has. It looks quite obviously like a 911 and continues with a 9000rpm flat six, a manual gearbox and one of the best chassis in the business. Quite predictably, Matt Prior found it scintillating.

Taking a similar approach is Ferrari, which chopped the roof off the 12Cilindri (no prizes for guessing how many naturally aspirated cylinders it has). The same Matt Prior was the one to drive it (tough month), declaring: "I mean, it's a V12-powered Ferrari, and I don't think I've met a bad one of those, but I thought this one was particularly lovely."

February also brought us plenty of experimental ways that aim to keep the fun in EVs. James Attwood got a passenger ride in the BMW Vision Driving Experience. It looks like it could be the next M3, with a wide-arched version of the Neue Klasse saloon concept body, but underneath it's a bespoke test bed for EV alchemy. With four motors, five fans and a central ECU that controls all the vehicle dynamics, it explores how EV driver's cars can evolve beyond just being fast (although it is also that). At the same time, the word on the street is that the next M3 will still be available with a straight six.

BMW is experimenting with EV torque vectoring in its prototypes, but Maserati already offers it in a

5 February **No 5723**

CUPRA TAVASCAN V1

★★★☆☆

Competent, but not very compelling or memorable

Price £47,340

Price as tested £48,675

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Braking endurance +2.3m (fade)

Weighted average charging rate 113kW

Second-row leg room 785mm

Cabin noise at 50mph 61dBA

5 February **No 5724**

AUDI RS6 AVANT GT

★★★★☆

Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted Audi estate

Price £176,975

Price as tested £176,975

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-100mph 7.3sec

Second-row leg room 700mm

Track test economy 7.4mpg

12 February **No 5725**

POLESTAR 3 LONG RANGE DUAL MOTOR LAUNCH EDITION

★★★★☆

Spacious, attractive, enticing to drive, with a few lapses

Price £75,900

Price as tested £79,200

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

70mph-0 42.7m (7deg C, damp)

Weight as tested 2610kg

Battery capacity 111kWh (total)

12 February **No 5726**

PEUGEOT 5008 HYBRID 136 GT

★★★☆☆

Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering

Price £41,590

Price as tested £42,940

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-62mph 10.5sec

Power to weight 79bhp per tonne

Total boot capacity 2232 litres

MOMENT TO FORGET

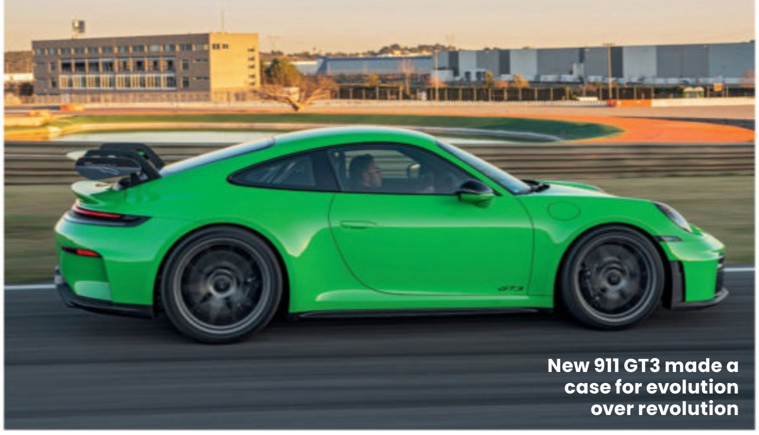
Catching the yips

Before you're allowed to review anything for Autocar, you've got to go for a drive with a senior staffer – usually road test editor Matt Saunders – to prove you're not a headcase. A random car is picked from the fleet and you go out for a few hours, talking over best practice and covering a few local routes. In my case, it was a mild-hybrid Nissan Qashqai. That's where the trouble began: first I couldn't get it in gear and then I stalled. Then I moved off in third, thinking I was in first. Then I stalled again. Saunders recognised I'd caught a case of the jitters, but the sheer embarrassment still keeps me up at night. **CM**

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Lotus Carlton at our '90s shoot

They say 'never meet your heroes', but after growing up in a Vauxhall-heavy household with my dad idolising the fabled Lotus Carlton, I just had to see if the legends I'd heard could be true. After encountering one on our '90s shoot, I found out they were. I was blown away by how truly fast it still felt – only a jet fighter must have been able to outdrag it back in the day – and its wonderful handling balance. I'll never forget the V6's boost-assisted burble as it laid two black lines onto the Tarmac after some sideways action. Meet your heroes. **JH**



New 911 GT3 made a case for evolution over revolution

Quote of the month

"Nostalgia fizzes through me the moment I turn the key and the wubbahwubbah of its idling 2.0-litre boxer permeates the chilled morning air like the twin rotors of an approaching Chinook."

Stephen Dobie on driving the 1999 Subaru Legacy GT-B

production car. The Folgore (that's lightning in Italian) version of the Granturismo packs three motors for a total of 751bhp. In our road test, it proved "quick enough to stunt your speech and turn your stomach". On the road, it had plenty of composure and, thanks to siting the battery cells in the same place as the ICE powertrain, it had a likeably traditional character. Only the sheer mass and the notable understeer balance stopped it from really convincing as a driver's car.

Well, that and its £195,430 as-tested price. At the other end of the spectrum, we endeavoured to find our favourite affordable fun EV. Of the five entrants, not all covered themselves in glory. The MG 4 did well to be invited and the Alfa Romeo Junior Veloce was a bit disappointing. The Mini Cooper SE's boisterous character wasn't to all tastes, but some warmed to it. The stars here were the Cupra Born VZ and the Alpine A290. The Cupra represents the revival that rear-wheel drive is enjoying with EVs, while the A290 channelled enough old-school hot hatch energy to endear itself to the judges.

Then again, maybe the route to fun is to leave helmsmanship to one side and choose charm and whimsy instead. Editor Mark Tisshaw fell for the new Fiat Grande Panda, packed as it is with retro style and Easter eggs, and declared it "not the most fun car to drive but nonetheless a remarkably fun car".

ILLYA VERPRAET

19 February **No 5727**

PORSCHE MACAN TURBO ELECTRIC

★★★½☆

Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis technology

Price £96,900

Price as tested £108,079

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-100mph 7.3sec

Weighted average charging rate 197kW

Track test economy 1.0mpkWh

19 February **No 5728**

MAZDA CX-30 E-SKYACTIV G 2.5 EXCLUSIVE-LINE

Alternative powertrain is a credit to an unconventional compact SUV

★★★★☆

Price £29,165

Price as tested £29,765

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Touring test economy 45.2mpg

Weight as tested 1422kg

Weight distribution as tested (f/r) 62%/38%

26 February **No 5729**

XPENG G6 RWD STANDARD RANGE

★★★½☆

Lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal

Price £39,990

Price as tested £40,890

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Second-row leg room 820mm

Drag coefficient 0.25

0-60mph 6.8sec

26 February **No 5730**

MASERATI GRANTURISMO FOLGORE

★★★½☆

Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8

Price £178,330

Price as tested £195,430

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 2.9sec

Weighted average charging rate 202kW

March

BRITAIN'S CHEAPEST EVs FACE OFF
AUTOCAR
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
JAG: WHAT'S NEXT
How they're really going to beat Bentley
HYUNDAI'S RANGE ROVER RATED
KIA'S COOL NEW PUMA-BEATER
PORSCHE ROAD TEST
WHY NEW GTS IS THE 911 YOU WANT
BMW iX: IT'S GREAT, BUT THAT GRILLE...
'MOST EVs SUCK,' SAYS EV MAKER

CAN LEWIS WIN AT FERRARI?
AUTOCAR
THE UP IS BACK!
NEW BABY VW
It's the affordable EV you've been waiting for
HURRAH! VOLVO SAVES THE SALOON
THE EV START-UP TESLA'S AFRAID OF
RENAULT 5: SO HOW GOOD REALLY IS IT?

NEW CLA MERC'S 500-MILE EV
AUTOCAR
SKODA'S ULTIMATE ALL-ROUNDER
NEW OCTAVIA
New look, new tech, still the people's 3 Series
ALL-NEW ABARTH: QUICK AND QUIRKY
PRIOR'S CATERHAM vs JET FIGHTER
USED GUIDE: A TINY 4x4 FIAT FOR £1500
MEET THE MAN WHO REALLY LOVES ROUNDABOUTS

SCOOP AUDI'S BRINGING BACK THE TT
AUTOCAR
IN-DEPTH ROAD TEST
NEW VANQUISH
Amazing Aston is world's best super-GT
DRIVEN
MOST POWERFUL ROLLS-ROYCE EVER

IF YOU COULD choose any five cars to fill a garage, what would you go for? The question is something of a fascination here at Autocar Towers, in part because there's got to be some formulation that is objectively correct. March's road test subjects surely came close.

It all kicked off with the Porsche 911 GTS. The first example of the venerable sports car to adopt some form of hybridisation, it will come to define the future of its maker. Just as well that it's excellent, then. Its clever 'e-turbo' practically banishes the boostiness of the entry 911's 3.0-litre powerplant and, in the real world, might even be as quick as the most recent 911 GT2 RS. You can sense its extra 150kg when you're pushing on and we suspect its new 3.6-litre engine could make an even sweeter driver's car shorn of its turbos and hybrid elements. But as a jack of all trades, this is quite possibly the ultimate modern 911.

With the weekend warrior in our five-car garage sorted, onto the daily driver. The Renault 5 was quite possibly the most hotly anticipated model of 2025, thanks to its headline-grabbing price – starting at just £22,995 back in March – and cutesy styling. Mercifully, it lived up to the hype, bringing a joie de vivre found in few other EVs regardless of price. Sure, the rear seats are compromised for space and the motorway range is less than stellar, but the 5 feels a remarkably complete car – particularly at the money. Renault has found its mojo once again.

As for a school-run hauler, the Skoda Elroq proved impressive. Essentially a cut-down Enyaq, it retains the maturity and practicality we've come to expect of the Czech brand's EVs. It might not be all that much fun – when has an electric SUV ever been, really? – but it is nearly viceless otherwise.

Our next candidate is almost the total opposite of the Elroq: a traditional diesel-fuelled, straight-six-powered estate that neatly ticks the essential 'bahn-storming box in our five-car fleet. The Mercedes E450d delivers a massive 553lb ft from little above idle and, provided you opt for air suspension, it rides almost as well as an S-Class. It's a fitting swansong for the classical family wagon – a car you could buy, drive for 100,000 miles and hand down to your children like a family heirloom. We'll miss it when it's gone.

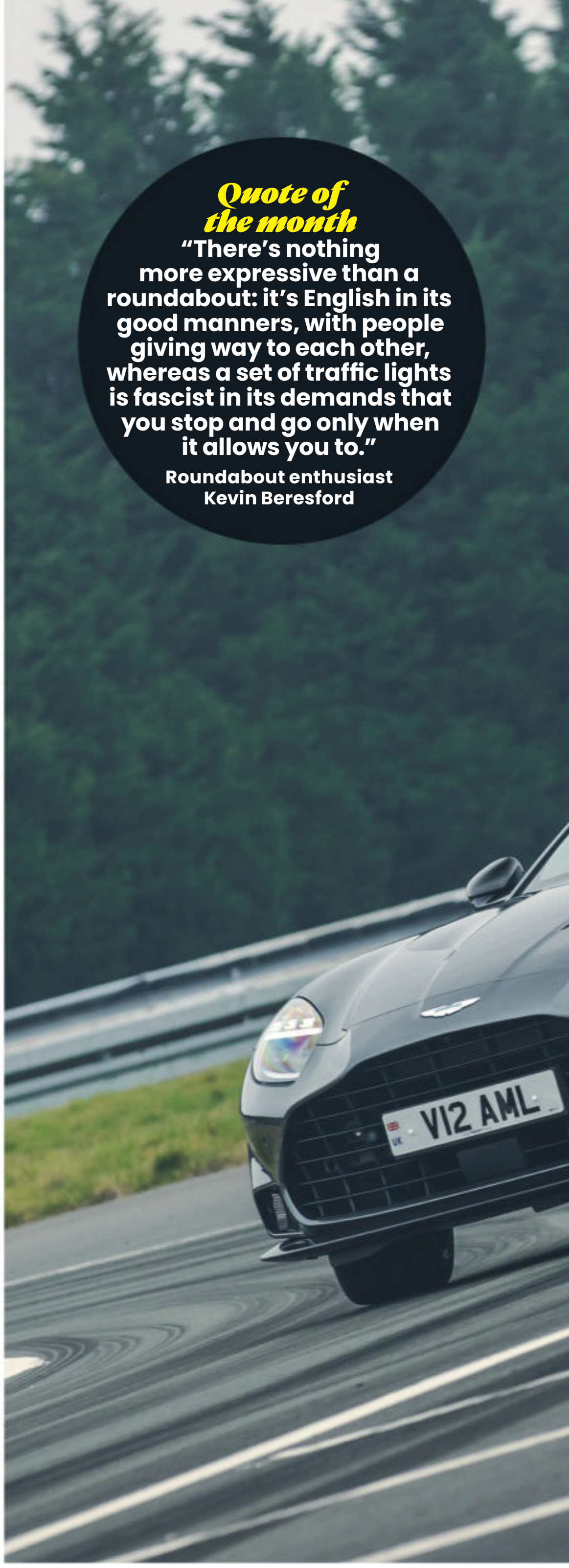
So to the climax, that one special-occasion car as dramatic in its styling as in its technical make-up. The Aston Martin Vanquish's twin-turbocharged V12 yields "bottomless" torque and an ear-piercing snort. It's an utter monster, yet still capable of fulfilling touring duties with aplomb. Stopping the lot is a pair of 410mm carbon-ceramic front discs – the largest yet fitted to a traditional performance coupé. "Part thug, part aristocrat, it's a total joy," we concluded.

Beresford, president of the UK Roundabout Appreciation Society

Quote of the month

"There's nothing more expressive than a roundabout: it's English in its good manners, with people giving way to each other, whereas a set of traffic lights is fascist in its demands that you stop and go only when it allows you to."

Roundabout enthusiast Kevin Beresford



5 March **No 5731**

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA GTS

★★★★½

Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere

Price £132,600
Price as tested £145,543

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 2.8sec
30-70mph 2.6sec
Touring test economy 34.3mpg
70mph-0 38.9m (8deg C, dry)

12 March **No 5732**

RENAULT 5 COMFORT RANGE ICONIC FIVE

★★★★½

Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game

Price £28,995
Price as tested £30,195

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Touring test range 161 miles
Weighted average charging rate 71kW
0-60mph 7.7sec

19 March **No 5733**

SKODA ELROQ 85 EDITION

Another well-rounded, class-topping EV from Skoda

★★★★½

Price £38,650
Price as tested £40,230

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Average test range 246 miles
Average test economy 3.2mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 112kW
30-70mph 5.0sec

19 March **No 5734**

MERCEDES E450D ESTATE EXCLUSIVE PREMIUM PLUS

Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you'd ever need

★★★★½

Price £88,945
Price as tested £89,640

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Touring test range 740 miles
30-70mph 4.3sec

Extended road test laid bare talent of cover car Vanquish

As answers to the five-car question go, March 2025 was pretty damn convincing. But, as ever, there are a few compelling alternatives that you could sub in.

The swansong Caterham CSR that Matt Prior piloted around the Mach Loop makes a convincing case as a summer toy, while the revised BMW M2 CS came close to perfecting the baby M-car recipe. Or you could leave the road altogether with the beguiling Rivian R1T, as James Attwood did in the Nevadan desert.

And do you really need something as chunky as a Renault 5 for nipping to the shops? What about the petrol-powered Kia Picanto that Steve Cropley used to whiz around Jersey's winding lanes?

As for special occasions, few nail the brief better than the Rolls-Royce Spectre Black Badge we tried in March – but could you really justify it over the violence of the Vanquish?

Many questions, so few answers. Back to arguing we go…

CHARLIE MARTIN

Rivian's R1T impressed in March

MOMENT TO FORGET
Knife crime

Having had a torrid bug, I dragged myself out of bed to fulfil my promise to take my son away for a night. Luckily, I had Autocar's long-term Bentley Bentayga to get us there. Except, as we were about to set off, I noticed a knife-induced slit in a tyre. Best laid plans and all that. Bentley naturally couldn't resolve it on the spot to get us on our way, so my kind colleague Will Rimell leant me his Dacia Duster instead. **RB**

26 March **No 5735**

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT

★★★★½

Price £334,000
Price as tested £408,865

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 3.1sec
0-170mph 18.4sec
70mph-0 39.0m (9.5deg C, dry)
Touring test range 465 miles

BEAN AROUND THE WORLD

We explored Jersey in a Kia Picanto and enjoyed the road trip

MOMENT OF THE MONTH
Meeting Aston chairman Lawrence Stroll

How often do we hear from execs promising better days are ahead? Lawrence Stroll says it about Aston Martin but he has put his money where his mouth is by backing the road car and Formula 1 sides of the business with new facilities and working environments to deliver on his promise. The new F1 factory at Silverstone in particular is remarkable and it was inspiring to meet Stroll there to hear his vision for Aston. Credit to him for that. **MT**

April

SCOOP NEW BABY G-CLASS
AUTOCAR
DACIA'S DEFENDER
An affordable SUV to get excited about (at last)
LOTUS ROAD TEST: A TRUE BRIT SPORTS CAR
OFF-ROAD WRANGLER vs THE LAKE DISTRICT
BAG YOURSELF A USED DISCO SPORT FOR £6K

BUMPER 100-PAGE ISSUE
AUTOCAR
ULTIMATE 1990s SPECIAL
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
McLAREN'S SAVIOUR
Watch out, Ferrari: inside the shock merger that'll change everything
BEST '90s HEROES
NEW 'VETTE MADE IN BRITAIN

ROAD TEST BENTLEY CONTI GT
AUTOCAR
COMING 2027!
BABY DEFENDER
Everything you love about world's best 4x4, but smaller
IT'S A FUN FORD EV
HOW NISSAN WILL COME BACK FROM THE BRINK

RATED NEW BMW M5 TOURING
AUTOCAR
THE ICON'S NEXT ERA
NEW VW GOLF
Classic looks, radical tech–and there's still a GTI
PRIUS SHOCK! IT'S FUN TO DRIVE

RATED ALL-NEW TESLA MODEL Y
AUTOCAR
EVERY NEW RANGE ROVER
THE NEXT ERA What's coming and when
+ TOUGHEST DEFENDER'S TOUGHEST TEST

'90s fest: Diablo, TT, MGF, Lotus Carlton, 528i, RAV4, GT-R

2 April **No 5736**

LOTUS EMIRA V6 FIRST EDITION

★★★★⯪

The British sports car is alive, well and expensive

Price £92,500
Price as tested £105,055

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 4.4sec
Cabin noise at 70mph 76dBA
Touring test economy 29.0mpg

2 April **No 5737**

AUDI S E-TRON GT

★★★★☆

Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge

Price £108,710
Price as tested £134,261

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
30-70mph 2.4sec
70mph-0 44.3m (12deg C, dry)
Power 671bhp with launch control

9 April **No 5738**

JAECOO 7 SHS 2WD LUXURY

★★⯪☆☆

Efficient, keenly priced, but too many usability flaws

Price £35,065
Price as tested £35,665

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Second-row leg room 750mm
Touring test economy 35.0mpg
Electric test range 41 miles

9 April **No 5739**

RANGE ROVER P550E AUTOBIOGRAPHY

★★★★☆

A unique and enthralling character with added refinement in PHEV form

Price £138,500
Price as tested £148,850

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Noise at 70mph 62dBA
Electric test range 44 miles

16 April **No 5740**

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT SPEED HYBRID FIRST EDITION

★★★★☆

Fastest GT made quicker, not necessarily better

Price £236,600
Price as tested £296,550

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-150mph 15.5sec
70mph-0 50.3m (6deg C, dry)

IT COULD HAVE been the 1990s in Autocar during April, and not just because we had a bumper issue dedicated to celebrating motoring in the '90s.

That was the highlight of the month, of course. We gathered together 10 cars that characterised the '90s for a look back at what made them special, what made that decade such a fertile period for automotive variety, and whether these heroes of yesteryear still stacked up. The Diablo had plenty of characteristic Lamborghini panache and the Nissan Skyline GT-R demonstrated that it was so much more than a video game car, but it was the everyday workhorses that went on a real charm offensive. I certainly enjoyed my 20 minutes as a '90s dad driving Ford's pristine Mk1 Mondeo and, to this day, Matt Saunders still regularly insists he's planning to buy a Mk1 Toyota RAV4.

In some ways, Autocar's contents page often sounded like it could have been from the '90s. In the same month, we road tested a radical new Toyota Prius and had our first drive of the new Audi A6 diesel, the latest Morgan and a new version of the Ford Puma, which unfortunately wasn't a compact coupé with ludicrously wide wheel arches but an electric version of the UK's favourite small SUV. Still, it showed that Ford's still got it, with strong practicality, brilliant real-world efficiency and fun dynamics. And if you were doubting whether Ford was still an important player in Europe, consider that the Romanian government built a road, dubbed the Ford Highway, so its factory in Craiova could operate more efficiently, as Nick Gibbs reported.

Meanwhile, some of Britain's finest automotive exports faced road test scrutiny. After several years of it being on sale, we finally managed to take the Lotus Emira to the proving ground. It may have become too expensive over the past few years, but it is a rather wonderful sports car. That supercharged V6, ultra-mechanical manual gearbox and fluid handling make it a rare thing indeed.

The newly plug-in hybrid-powered Bentley Continental GT Speed is a very different take on the British performance car, with more powertrain and chassis tech than ever. While it's still a wonderful way to travel, we weren't convinced that all the new stuff was truly adding value. Even a Bentley is sometimes better when it's a little lighter and simpler.

Elsewhere, we had a few tearful departures from the long-term fleet, as podcast partners Matt Prior and Steve Cropley had grown rather attached to their disparate modes of transport. The Ineos Grenadier wasn't to all tastes, but Prior clicked with the quirky off-roader. The Genesis G80 Electrified, on the other hand, was a bit of a crowd favourite, making a great case for electric saloons over SUVs with its understated style, comfort and surprisingly long range.

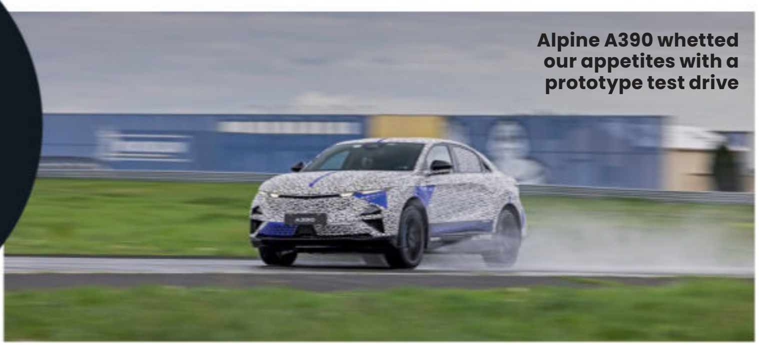
ILLYA VERPRAET

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Shanghai show

I'd long been covering the rise of the Chinese car industry but had not yet been there, so the Shanghai motor show was the perfect chance to put faces to the innumerable names. Xpeng, Li Auto, Galaxy, Leapmotor, Firefly, Baojun, Avatr, Jetour, Exeed… Buick?! Here they all were in the metal. It's easy to feel intimidated by the impending tsunami of unfamiliarity, but all I saw were interesting cars being built well and equipped with kit we would have not long ago thought of as space-age. Bring it on. **FP**

Saunders, Cropley and Lane revelled in the '90s machinery



Alpine A390 whetted our appetites with a prototype test drive

MOMENT TO FORGET

Denza arrives in Europe

Denza is BYD's answer to Porsche, so to showcase its premium credentials, the firm opted to stage the European launch during Milan Design Week. It was a truly odd event, with a long evening reveal and a short, follow-up, track-only drive. The event dinner was very nice, although it dragged on for several hours longer than needed and felt more surreal because I was sat with a group of people I didn't recognise. Turned out several of them were former Love Island contestants and apparently quite famous. Still, the cars held plenty of interest. **JA**

Quote of the month

"Some years later, the test track was replaced by the works canteen. 'It was so big that birds flew around inside it.'"

Andrew Duerden, Vauxhall's resident archivist, speaks to John Evans about the rise and fall of Vauxhall Luton – and its huge canteen

16 April No 5741

AUDI S6 E-TRON AVANT LAUNCH EDITION

★★★⯪☆

Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character

Price £95,805

Price as tested £95,805

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Boot space 502 litres

0-100mph 8.5sec

23 April No 5742

TOYOTA PRIUS PLUG-IN DESIGN

★★★★☆

Better late than never for the best Prius to date

Price £37,315

Price as tested £37,970

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 6.6sec

Touring test economy 56.1mpg

Electric test range 46 miles

23 April No 5743

BMW M4 CS

★★★★☆

Stunning performance and pace come with costs that aren't so easy to justify

Price £122,685

Price as tested £130,993

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-100mph 6.1sec

70mph-0 40.5m (12.5deg C, dry)

Cabin noise at 70mph 68dBA

30 April No 5744

LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 P635 OCTA EDITION 1

★★★★⯪

Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring

Price £163,545

Price as tested £165,105

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-100mph 10.1sec

70mph-0 56.7m (14deg C, dry)

Track test economy 5.4mpg

30 April No 5745

CITROEN E-C3 MAX

★★★⯪☆

Predictable limitations, but plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money

Price £23,795

Price as tested £24,155

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Standing quarter mile 18.3sec at 77.7mph

Second-row leg room 660mm

May

DRIVEN MEGA NEW RENAULT 4
AUTOCAR
37 BEST USED CARS FOR SUMMER

ROAD TEST HOTTEST MINI EVER
AUTOCAR
FREELANDER IS BACK!

ROAD TEST NEW LAND CRUISER
AUTOCAR
NEW TESLA vs SKODA
THE MICRA IS BACK!

ROAD TEST LOTUS'S SUPER-SALOON
AUTOCAR
ULTIMATE M2
HOW LONG DOES A TESLA BATTERY REALLY LAST?

MAY PROVED TO be a remarkable month for demonstrating the variety and quality of cars being produced in 2025 and our road testers praised everything from a 2.5-tonne electric Lotus saloon to an exhaust-spouting spicy Mini to a diesel, body-on-frame 4x4.

The fact that only one of the month's six road test subjects received fewer than four stars (and the outlier wasn't far off) attests to the high standards at which the industry is now consistently working, especially in areas such as refinement, performance and technology.

But there is always room for improvement, even in impressive cars like the Bentley Flying Spur, Mini John Cooper Works and mega-range electric Mercedes EQS 450+ we road tested during the month. The advanced technology offered by some of these cars is only an asset when it works well. The Flying Spur's plug-in hybrid powertrain delivered outstanding performance but its extra weight meant sacrifices elsewhere; the Mini was charismatic but lacked the interaction of a manual gearbox; and the Mercedes failed to deliver the range or efficiency it promised.

But there are still new models that excel in all areas and we found one such car in the form of the updated Porsche Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid. In fact, we awarded it the full five stars in its UK first drive for the way it balanced luxury and driver appeal. (Note that it shares its powertrain with the Flying Spur.)

Nothing else could match that Panamera's high-water mark during May, but its stablemate, the Taycan Turbo GT, came pretty close with four and a half stars.

We don't award star ratings to first drives when the test has taken place outside of the UK, but you didn't need the guidance of a star rating system to recognise that Porsche's revisions had notably enhanced the appeal of the 911 Carrera S, that the BYD Dolphin Surf was going to prove excellent value for money and that the Renault 4 was as convincing as the acclaimed 5.

Elsewhere, the Volvo V90 was back on sale in the UK, in mildly updated form, having been withdrawn last year and it marked a promising return. "Volvo at its very best", we concluded, after testing this long-lived estate model.

One of Volvo's newest models, the EX30, was also driven, and while it offered good value for money in its cheapest form, its user interface still greatly frustrated.

We pitted two key electric SUVs against each other, with the revised Tesla Model Y just edging the Skoda Enyaq – although we couldn't help pointing out that the novelty of the Volkswagen ID 7 electric estate hasn't worn off and a lightly used Hyundai Ioniq 5 N could be had for the same money.

It wasn't all new cars, though, and we brought you our guide to the 37 best used cars for summer. This focused on convertibles and modern classics, with a few off-roaders and vans for good measure (for a staycation, of course).

New drop-tops are a bit thin on the ground these days, but the Mercedes-AMG CLE 53 certainly entertained, albeit perhaps not quite as much as Matt Prior's £850 Audi A2 diesel.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

We found the CLE 53's mix of comfort and fun compelling

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Nomad jump shot at Sweet Lamb

When a car like the Defender Octa comes along, you have to go to special lengths to properly test it – and our way involved a Sweet Lamb rally stage, an Ariel Nomad 2 and a Ford Mustang Mach-E Rally. Despite the Land Rover's towering capability, the Ford and Ariel impressed me most – the Ford for soaking up abuse and the Ariel because it was just so rewarding. The Nomad was also the car to pick for the story's jump shot. Afterburners on, suspension to full La-Z-Boy mode, it felt born to do it. **MS**

MOMENT TO FORGET

Meeting Marty the cartoon Porsche

The Taycan Turbo GT test car stopped me in my tracks when I picked it up from Porsche's UK offices. In white, with Taycan written as large as it could be on the roof and sides of the car in jet black, it looked like the talking zebra from Madagascar. For less than the price of the decal set, you could have 'paint to sample' in any colour you could imagine. It might be the most heinous case of configurator misuse I've ever come across. **MS**

7 May **No 5746**

MERCEDES-BENZ EQS 450+ BUSINESS CLASS

★★★★☆

Progress, but still not quite the ultimate luxury EV

Price £119,610
Price as tested £129,110

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Everyday test range 366 miles
Weight as tested 2608kg
Boot capacity 620 litres

14 May **No 5747**

MINI JOHN COOPER WORKS

★★★★☆

A proper hot hatch, let down by ride and user interface

Price £33,265
Price as tested £39,215

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Weight as tested 1363kg
0-60mph 5.8sec
Weight distribution as tested (f/r) 63%/37%
Braking endurance +2.4m (fade)

14 May **No 5748**

AUDI Q5 TDI QUATTRO 204PS S LINE

★★★½☆

Pleasant and competitive, but no particular step forward

Price £55,660
Price as tested £63,130

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Everyday test economy 61.0mpg
Weight as tested 2072kg
0-60mph 6.7sec

21 May **No 5749**

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER 2.8 D-4D 204 INVINCIBLE

★★★★☆

Tough cookie gets more kerb appeal and drivability

Price £77,845
Price as tested £77,845

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Everyday test economy 37.5mpg
Standing quarter mile 18.0sec at 78.9mph
Weight/as tested 2330kg/2503kg

Model Y beat Enyaq but there were caveats to its win

> ***Quote of the month***
>
> **“It had bucketloads of star quality; its chassis and steering were outstanding; and its 1.6-litre, 10,000rpm twin-charged four-cylinder combustion engine topped the lot. It was like some mutant superbike motor backed by epic electric torque fill. It was monumental.”**
>
> **Matt Saunders on the prototype Jaguar CX-75**

21 May **No 5750**

BENTLEY FLYING SPUR SPEED FIRST EDITION

★★★★☆

Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur’s remit and skyrockets performance

Price £226,500

Price as tested £291,390

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

30-70mph 2.7sec

WLTP/ave test economy 202mpg/22.0mpg

28 May **No 5751**

LOTUS EMEYA 600 GT

★★★★☆

A good electric saloon and a good Lotus

Price £91,305

Price as tested £102,555

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Weighted average charging rate 319kW

Length 5139mm

Touring test range 237 miles

Weight as tested 2478kg

Purchase of the year? It could well be Prior’s Audi A2

June

ROAD TEST FORD PUMA EV
AUTOCAR
2025'S LEAST LIKELY GROUP TEST
BEST DIESELS
Don't write that diesel obituary just yet...
NEW AUDI RS6: IT'S STILL A V8
THE ULTIMATE SMALL EV ALTERNATIVE?
MAZDA'S £2K BMW BEATER

SCOOP VW'S HOTTEST HATCH EVER
AUTOCAR
MEGA-DEFENDER vs RIVALS
Three wild off-roaders, one rally stage...
FIRST DRIVE: BMW'S RADICAL NEW ERA
BIGSTER ROAD TEST: BIG, BOLD & BRILLIANT
CHINA'S HALF-PRICE VOLVO RIVAL RATED

OFFICIAL PEUGEOT'S GTI IS BACK
AUTOCAR
SUPER-GT SHOWDOWN
ASTON vs FERRARI
Epic V12s face off on Britain's best roads
12 NEW CARS REVEALED AND RATED
SCOOP: NEXT DUSTER
FASTEST SKODA EVER
KIA'S MODEL 3
FRANCE'S BENTLEY
THE LEAF REINVENTED
INSIDE GM'S SECRET BRIT BASE

REVEALED FASTEST GOLF GTI EVER
AUTOCAR
100-PAGE AWARDS SPECIAL
BRITAIN'S BEST CARS
...and the brilliant people behind them
FEATURING Defender, Superb, 911, Ioniq 5 N, Grande Panda & more
'LAVISH' ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST

THE MONTH WAS characterised by some reasonably prosaic road tests but also some phenomenally juicy group tests. You could be at least partly forgiven for glossing over a full telemetry-aided rundown on the Cupra Terramar in road test No 5755 in favour of the Vanquish versus 12Cilindri showdown a couple of pages later. It was a contest the Ferrari dominated, at least from a dynamic perspective. We concluded that the Aston Martin was perhaps the finer GT in narrow terms, with the sweeter cabin ambience, but its advantage in this regard was dwarfed by the Italian car's ability to delight its driver on a half-decent road, while retaining those all-important long-distance manners. Both cars were pretty wonderful. Long live their kind.

A more esoteric affair unfolded in the 11 June magazine. Matt Saunders had a few weeks earlier taken the new Land Rover Defender Octa to the Sweet Lamb rally complex, along with Ariel's second-generation Nomad and a rally-flavoured Ford Mustang Mach-E. "The emergence of the dual-purpose, loose-surface-specialist, off-road performance car is one of the better reasons for enthusiastic drivers like us to be cheerful," said Saunders, before spending the afternoon kicking a quarry's worth of gravel six feet up into the air. So vivid was this story on the page that the true lede of the issue was buried. Greg Kable was among the first people outside of BMW to drive the new iX3, albeit in prototype form. This is a car of colossal importance, and Kable's early verdict was encouraging: "The engineering reset BMW needed."

June was also our chance to celebrate the greatest cars and most impressive industry figures of the past year, by way of the annual Autocar Awards. It was a varied roll call in 2025. Five-star cars included the Skoda Superb and the Porsche 911 S/T, while the people winning awards ranged from Stellantis's UK distribution supremo Diane Miller to Alpine chief technology officer and engineer extraordinaire Philippe Krief.

Elsewhere, Stephen Dobie assembled three disparate examples of a dying breed: big-hearted diesels. The fact that such cars are now rare enough to justify a stand-alone story is dispiriting for those of us who love nothing more than huge torque figures and even bigger touring ranges. However, the quality of the stalwarts is exceptionally high. Alpina's D4 S, the Mercedes E450d Estate and the Range Rover Sport D350 are not cheap cars, but they are enviably good company in the real world and will surely be sought after in years to come.

We should also highlight two road test cars that arrived rather subtly but have the potential to shake up their segments. One was the Dacia Bigster, which we rated highly in light of its characteristically low price and easy-going nature. The other was the Puma Gen-E, which finally addressed Ford's laggard status in the electric supermini arena. It's no game-changer, but it brings some Ford-typical handling appeal to the class and deserves to do well.
RICHARD LANE

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

A702 in a 12Cilindri

For the Vanquish versus 12Cilindri contest, Matt Prior and I headed to the Scottish Lowlands. I drove the Ferrari up and it was fine on the motorway. But it was after pulling off the A74(M) and heading south on the heavenly A702 that it dropped my jaw. So powerful and expressive but scalpel-precise. I think that if the car's doubters could drive it hard on a road like that, there wouldn't be any left. **RL**

Sweet Lamb stage and three reasons to be cheerful

4 June **No 5752**

FORD PUMA GEN-E SELECT

★★★★☆

Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class
Price £29,995
Price as tested £31,795
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 7.2sec
Everyday test economy 6.2mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 68kW
Touring test range 148 miles

4 June **No 5753**

KGM TORRES 1.5T K40 AWD

★★⯪☆☆

Cheerful enough but not as cheap or as capable as we had hoped
Price £41,749
Price as tested £43,378
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Everyday test economy 37.4mpg
0-100mph 36.6sec
Weight as tested 1661kg
Boot space 703 litres

11 June **No 5754**

DACIA BIGSTER HYBRID 155 JOURNEY

★★★★☆

Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature
Price £29,440
Price as tested £31,040
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Second-row leg room 690mm
Touring test range 460 miles
Everyday test economy 72.4mpg

18 June **No 5755**

CUPRA TERRAMAR 2.0 TSI 4DRIVE VZ2

★★★★☆

Hottish Tiguan cousin is likeable but a bit too sensible
Price £49,395
Price as tested £50,380
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 5.6sec
Weight as tested 1737kg
Touring test economy 35.0mpg

Quote of the month

“All went quiet on the Wey front long ago, but perhaps you might fancy a Tank or a Poer...?”

Beats us, too. Kris Culmer gets to grips with the GWM Haval Jolion Pro

25 June No 5756

ROLLS-ROYCE GHOST SERIES II BLACK BADGE

★★★★½

Flirts with sporting appeal while retaining its Rolls DNA

Price £337,545

Price as tested na

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Weight as tested 2576kg

0-100mph 9.8sec

Door span 4060mm

Autocar Awards feted top people and these best cars

MOMENT TO FORGET

Toyota Urban Cruiser

I found the Toyota Urban Cruiser launch disappointing, but not simply because the car is completely identical to the Suzuki eVitara that I’d driven only a month earlier – quite a mediocre car. It’s far from the worst car I’ve driven this year, but it commits a sin that’s just as big: it’s such an uninspired effort. At a time when Chinese car makers are churning out fairly cheap transport, the ‘legacy’ manufacturers need to do better than that. **IV**

July

REVEALED NEW FERRARI AMALFI
AUTOCAR
MERC'S FUTURE

HOT MINI JCW vs YORKSHIRE
AUTOCAR
NEW BENTLEY
HOT HATCH, EPIC ENGINE

DRIVEN RANGE ROVER'S FIRST EV
AUTOCAR
FERRARI F80

RATED MERC'S NEW 500-MILE EV
AUTOCAR
NEW ASTON vs RIVALS
SCOOP NEW MASERATI GT

ROAD TEST THE WORLD'S FASTEST CAR
AUTOCAR
50 BEST USED CARS
MAD NEW LAMBO

2 July No 5757

VOLVO XC90 B5 AWD ULTRA BRIGHT

★★★½☆

Still a mature, versatile, wilfully unspectacular choice

Price £76,950
Price as tested £77,745
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Max boot loading length (to front seats) 2120mm
Cabin noise at 50mph 61dBA

2 July No 5758

FORD TOURNEO CONNECT 1.5 ECOBOOST PHEV TITANIUM

★★★½☆

PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV

Price £37,270
Price as tested £37,990
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Max boot loading height (to roof) 1190mm
Electric test range 64 miles

9 July No 5759

AUDI RS3 SPORTBACK CARBON VORSPRUNG

★★★★☆

Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its engine

Price £70,330
Price as tested £70,330
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 3.6sec
30-70mph 3.3sec
Braking endurance +0.8m (fade)

9 July No 5760

BMW iX XDRIVE60 M SPORT

★★★★½

Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet

Price £93,205
Price as tested £110,850
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Cabin noise at 50mph 58dBA
Touring test range 295 miles
Weighted average charging rate 142kW
Weight as tested 2637kg

F80 impresses more for capability than drama, said Prior

THE ROAD TEST that appeared in our 30 July issue isn't one that this particular tester will easily forget.

We ask to fully benchmark million-pound hypercars all the time. But rarely are manufacturers, flooded with an excess of interest for their most expensive models, willing to take the risk: either that they won't go as fast as they're supposed to, or that we might be at all critical of them. Because who in their right mind would spend so much on a car that any enthusiast considered anything less than exceptional?

Perhaps someone at Lotus, with an inkling of the job cuts pain waiting around the corner, thought a full set of Autocar road test figures might be a fitting monument to the boldness and commitment of Hethel's many designers and engineers who had worked on the 2013bhp Evija hypercar. I've no idea how many lost their jobs just weeks after our 10-page road test hit the shelves but it's proof, as if it were needed, that there is often little justice in the car business.

Against the clock, the Evija did anything but disappoint. It's hard to put into words how otherworldly this remarkable car feels when accelerating flat out, as it's still finding a way to put more and more of its leviathan power reserves through its wheels even well beyond 100mph. I've never experienced anything quite like it. And though we've asked since then to do directly comparable tests on the Rimac Nevera and other similarly powerful mega-exotics – and, rest assured, we'll keep asking, because what else are we here for? – it's quite possible that I never will again.

> ***Quote of the month***
>
> **"We didn't struggle because we didn't have money, despite what the analysts said. We struggled because we spent too much. It's like everybody thought they were a billionaire, just because Lawrence [Stroll] is."**
>
> **New CEO Adrian Hallmark giving his take on Aston's issues**

But you need look no further than our first drive of the incredible Ferrari F80, reported by Matt Prior in our 16 July issue, for evidence that there are still plenty of targets for us to pursue. Or, indeed, to our drive in the 1578bhp Bugatti W16 Mistral that appeared in the very same issue (one for hypercar fans to keep, for sure).

While there was sunshine to soak up, we certainly took advantage. James Disdale brought us an idyllic-looking mid-Wales triple test of the new Aston Martin Vantage Roadster, as it met its opposite numbers from McLaren and Ferrari. The Roma Spider scored a narrow win, pipping the Artura Spider and resigning the more rambunctious, less well-mannered Aston to third spot. But it was one of those tests that looked so good on the page that you would have grabbed hold of any of its protagonists, dug out your sunglasses and disappeared for a long drive if you could have.

We reported on the UK government's returning Electric Car Grant in our news pages, something that coincided with our first drive report on Mercedes' impressive CLA – an EV that, sadly, is too expensive to qualify for the subsidy, but it stood out to Illya Verpraet for its game-changing efficiency, range and charging speed.

Elsewhere during July, we tempted you with a package of our 50 greatest used cars; visited Renault's new museum at Flins, near Paris; and toured some of North Yorkshire's greatest driving roads in the new Mini JCW.

MATT SAUNDERS

Aston, Ferrari and McLaren blew the roof off in Wales

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Old BMWs

BMW rolled out some of its heritage fleet cars at the UK launch of the M3 CS Touring and I had a quick spin in the 'E46' M3 CSL (scintillating engine, surprisingly taut chassis, shonky gearbox) and 'E30' M3. The E30 was due for a bit of workshop TLC but, regardless, I loved the experience. The style, size, engine zip, handling balance and general character just suit me to a T. Less than a month later, I'd agreed to buy my own E30. Dangers of the job… **IV**

16 July **No 5761**

RENAULT 4 E-TECH COMFORT RANGE ICONIC

★★★★☆

Charismatic but grown-up, the 4 is a real contender

Price £30,995

Price as tested £32,145

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Second-row head room 970mm

Test average economy 3.5mpkWh

Everyday test range 291 miles

23 July **No 5762**

MG S5 EV LONG RANGE TROPHY

★★★★☆

Outstrips expectations for the money, except on range

Price £33,495

Price as tested £34,040

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Second-row leg room 770mm

0-60mph 6.0sec

Test peak charging rate 136kW (30% SoC)

30 July **No 5763**

LOTUS EVIJA

★★★★☆

Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions

Price £2,400,000

Price as tested na

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-150mph 7.7sec

Standing km 16.2sec at 217.4mph

Cabin noise at 70mph 79dBA

MOMENT TO FORGET

Ferrari F80 launch

There was pressure in the air at the Ferrari F80 launch on Italy's Adriatic Coast, both professionally and physically. One of the hottest summers on record coupled with the sea of Tarmac that surrounds Misano led to the most physically strenuous car-to-car session of my life. Keeping my (harnessed) upper body outside of our tracking car, £3m hypercar feet from my lens, as we ran the track's kerbs in our humble hire car for photos was utterly exhausting. **JH**

August

ROAD TEST MORGAN'S 911
AUTOCAR
EVERY NEW VW
The reinvention is here: what's coming, when – and why
EXCLUSIVE WE MEET FORD'S FIRST FAMILY

DRIVEN ASTON'S WILD SUPERCAR
AUTOCAR
£100 A WEEK HEROES
15 fast, fun cars that won't break the bank

AUTOCAR
25 YEARS OF ATOM
NEW BENTLEY
EXCLUSIVE Supersports is back as most extreme Conti yet
HOT NEW CORSA
WHERE THE CAR WORLD FINDS ITS FUTURE STARS

ROAD TEST TESLA MODEL Y
AUTOCAR
10 NEW PORSCHES
The radical new models to revive the brand
+ NEW CAYENNE DRIVEN
HYUNDAI vs MORGAN
THEY'RE RIVALS... HONEST

IF YOU'RE THE sort of person who knows that 290bhp per tonne is (give or take) the power-to-weight ratio of both the Morgan Supersport and the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N, then congratulations: not only did you probably get top marks in the Christmas quiz in our last issue, but you'd also have loved our twin test of those two very different cars.

Granted, a lightweight retro British sports car and a high-tech electric performance beast aren't easy to compare, but Vicky Parrott saw that shared stat as an excuse to take both of them to Wales and revel in two of the finest enthusiast cars you can buy today. Unusual? Clearly, but that's how we roll in August, when the car industry largely shuts down and we have a bit of freedom to get weird.

In another unusual gathering, we brought together Aston Martin creative director Marek Reichman with Renault Group design chief Laurens van den Acker so they could swap cars and compare notes on modern design trends. Van den Acker enjoyed it so much, he's keen to do it again: any designers interested, just drop us a line.

But while the launch calendar was quiet in August, we still had plenty of crucial new metal to test. Key models submitted to the road testers' measuring tape included the updated Tesla Model Y, the BYD Dolphin Surf and the Porsche Macan Electric. It's the sort of variety of models that prove EVs definitely aren't homogeneous and each, in their own way, is critical to the future prospects of the brands behind them.

Another even more important electric Porsche is on the way, and in late August Greg Kable drove a prototype of the new Cayenne Electric. In Turbo form, it packed around 805bhp – 979bhp if you engaged launch control – and offered "explosive performance" on and off road, while also serving up traditional Porsche luxury. Given the challenges facing Porsche, it feels like the model the company really needs – if consumer demand for luxury EVs picks up.

Hyundai Ioniq 5 N and a new Morgan: can you spot a link?

Aston Martin is another brand facing a few financial challenges, and in August we also had our first taste of a pivotal model for the British company: the new Valhalla (right). Granted, a 1064bhp V8 twin-turbocharged hypercar isn't going to shift in the showroom like the DBX SUV, but it does showcase a new line of mid-engined monsters that could help in the marque's perennial quest to become Britain's Ferrari. Matt Prior certainly liked it, calling it a hardcore hypercar that offers "the balance and friendliness of a traditional Aston".

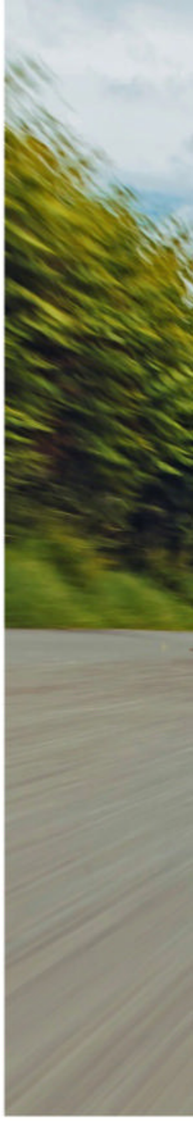
One firm that doesn't want to be Britain's Ferrari is Ariel Motors, the Somerset maker that has achieved cult status with the awesome Atom and Nomad. Ariel is celebrating its 25th anniversary, so Prior and Steve Cropley paid a visit to drive some of its finest vehicles and find out about company boss Simon Saunders' big plans for the future. That's largely driven by Saunders' restless attitude and relentless quest for improvement. He doesn't strike you as the sort of person who is that bothered about summer holidays. And given everything we packed into a quiet month – we haven't even got round to mentioning the bold new Vauxhall Corsa or our exclusive scoop on the new Bentley Continental Supersports – it's just as well the Autocar team isn't, either…

JAMES ATTWOOD

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Car of the century

It's easy to get caught up in shiny new metal, which we're lucky enough to have around us most days in this job. But there's something rather special about reflecting on the most seminal cars of the past 25 years and gathering them all together for a bumper Autocar issue, as we did for our 24 September edition. Twenty-five years is a long period from which to choose a car and part of the fun was the broad debate it provoked. I was happy with my choice of a BMW i8 – and even more pleased I was able to enjoy it on a sunny day. I probably could have gone for any of the selected cars, though Mark Tisshaw's Mk7 Volkswagen Golf GTI had the edge… **RB**



6 August **No 5764**

MORGAN SUPERSPORT

★★★★☆

Most rounded Morgan to date yet still charismatic

Price £105,160
Price as tested £128,551

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 3.8sec
Touring test economy 44.2mpg
Weight as tested 1180kg
70mph-0 42.8m (20deg C, dry)

6 August **No 5765**

BYD DOLPHIN SURF BOOST

★★★★☆

Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable

Price £21,950
Price as tested £22,600

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 12.0sec
Everyday test economy 5.6mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 45kW

13 August **No 5766**

VOLKSWAGEN ID 7 GTX TOURER

★★★☆☆

Appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs

Price £62,700
Price as tested £67,775

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 5.3sec
Touring test economy 2.9mpkWh
Second-row leg room 850mm

13 August **No 5767**

PORSCHE MACAN ELECTRIC

★★★★☆

Well rounded in every sense and not without driver appeal

Price £68,500
Price as tested £73,612

ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 5.2sec
Touring test economy 3.0mpkWh
Weight as tested 2262kg
Weighted average charging rate 163kW

Ariel's first 25 years have produced an astonishing line-up

Quote of the month

"It was fully deserved. He should have been sent off."

Several decades on, Renault Group design chief Laurens van den Acker gives his side of a still-contentious football clash with Aston Martin counterpart Marek Reichman

Reichman and van den Acker swapped keys and opinions

Kable gave Cayenne Electric prototype a big thumbs up

20 August **No 5768**

MERCEDES-AMG CLE 53 4MATIC+ NIGHT EDITION PREMIUM PLUS COUPE

★★★★☆

Appealing GT leaves something on the table

Price £81,410

Price as tested £91,735

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 3.9sec

Average test economy 26.9mpg

27 August **No 5769**

TESLA MODEL Y LONG RANGE REAR-WHEEL DRIVE

★★★★☆

Evolution keeps the Model Y nicely on the boil – for now

Price £48,990

Price as tested £50,290

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 5.7sec

Average test range 315 miles

Dry braking 60mph-0 2.63sec (22deg C, dry)

27 August **No 5770**

VAUXHALL GRANDLAND HYBRID GS

★★★½☆

Spacious, functional, efficient, good value – yet neither grand nor lovely

Price £36,680

Price as tested £37,330

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 9.8sec

CO_2 emissions 124g/km

MOMENT TO FORGET

Geely and Lotus

Geely has made a mess of Lotus with a confused strategy around the rollout of EVs from the other side of the world that have nothing in common with the lightweight sports cars Lotus made its name on. This came to a head with another round of job cuts at Lotus's Hethel HQ, which is clinging on to its future as the home of the brand. How could this happen? The playbook is being written by Geely here on how not to modernise a famous old brand. Shocking. **MT**

September

EXCLUSIVE ALL-NEW VW GOLF R
AUTOCAR
FORD'S FUTURE
SCOOP Focus successor to spearhead Euro revival
ALPINE vs LOTUS

15 MUNICH MOTOR SHOW STARS
AUTOCAR
VA VA VOOM! NEW RENAULT CLIO
NEW AUDI TT
It's back – and it will change Audi forever
POLESTAR 5 DRIVEN
BRITAIN'S M5

THE TESTAROSSA IS BACK!
AUTOCAR
NEW RENAULT 4 vs FORD, MINI
Fun, affordable & electric: reborn icon battles rivals
ROAD TEST MERC G-CLASS EV
JLR CYBER ATTACK: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

BUMPER 100-PAGE ISSUE
AUTOCAR
STARRING Fiesta, Ferrari 458, Golf, Duster, Defender & more
BEST CARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY
+ THE 10 BEST SELLERS THE CARS WE ARGUED OVER TOP USED PICKS
A SALOON GAME-CHANGER

AS SEVERAL MAJOR European manufacturers emerged from their annual summer shutdown, September's Munich motor show kicked the automotive industry back into life with a flurry of new model launches.

Our news pages were filled with fresh metal, including (breathe in) the 500-mile Neue Klasse-inspired BMW iX3 electric SUV, the divisive new Renault Clio, Porsche's 700bhp 911 Turbo S, Hyundai's radical Concept 3, Skoda's Vision O estate concept and Mercedes' new electric GLC. And we haven't even mentioned Audi's consequential Concept C – Ingolstadt's future electric sports car inspired by the TT and R8.

But while European brands were on the offensive, the Chinese firms were also making their mark.

We had a first bite of the Chery Tiggo 7, which we praised for the plug-in hybrid's 56-mile electric range and affordability, but stopped short of declaring it better than European rivals. We also sampled the BYD Seal 6 DM-i estate, a pair of electric SUVs from Xpeng, GWM's affordable Poer 300 pick-up and the eye-catching Deepal S07, another cheap and cheerful offering unlikely to trouble Tesla, according to tester Vicky Parrott.

Performance cars remained high on the agenda, with back-to-back road tests of the Porsche 911 Carrera S and the Mercedes-AMG GT 43, which received four-and-a-half and four-star ratings respectively. "Rounded sports cars don't get much more polished than this" was Richard Lane's verdict on the latest 911, while he described the quirky Hyundai Inster EV as "more mature and capable than many of its rivals" and awarded it three and a half stars.

Full honours are incredibly rare, but Illya Verpraet duly handed a five-star rating to the superb BMW M340i xDrive saloon for its potent mix of comfort, entertainment and performance. We celebrated that performance with a comparison test of the Morgan Supersport, Ineos Grenadier and BMW M440i – all powered by BMW's captivating turbocharged six-cylinder petrol engine. It was an eclectic trio of cars, all different in their nature, and yet all enriched by the engine under the bonnet.

Another key comparison test pitted the new Lotus Emira Turbo SE against the Alpine A110. The Hethel-built sports car proved to be a brilliant junior supercar with a McLaren-like dynamic feel. But it was the A110 that reigned supreme, Verpraet calling it an "era-defining sports car".

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we assembled three affordable electric crossovers – the Renault 4, Mini Aceman and Ford Puma Gen-E – to see which was the most fun. While the Mini brought the most thrills and the Puma dynamism, the comfort-focused Renault 4 took the plaudits for its refinement and all-round appeal.

A 100-page special issue celebrating the 25 best cars of the past 25 years brought September to a close. Some of our team headed to Caffeine & Machine in Staffordshire to debate which of their picks deserved the outright win.

This brilliant bumper issue also revisited our staffers' abiding automotive memories from the past quarter century, alongside tips on how to bag the best used examples of our 25 era-defining cars.

SAM PHILLIPS

Quote of the month

"There was a faint, pervading feeling of European anxiety, typified for me by Mercedes' 'WELCOME HOME' message, which seemed to say: 'You left us, but now we need you. Please come back.' I'm not sure desperation sells cars."

Steve Cropley on the big German car makers signalling a new beginning at the Munich motor show

New 4 beat Aceman and Puma Gen-E for all-round ability

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

The Munich motor show

The covers came off 15 new cars, including from some of Europe's biggest hitters. The headline acts were the BMW iX3 and Mercedes GLC, which both served as pivot points for their makers in their push to go EV-only in 2035. There were also affordable VW Group EVs, Audi's 'TT' concept, Renault's new Clio and a host of Far East metal. So it's safe to say that Munich 2025 was the biggest European motor show in years. Will it be the start of a revival? Here's hoping. **WR**

3 September **No 5771**

PORSCHE 911 CARRERA S

★★★★⯪

Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it

Price £120,500

Price as tested £149,585

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-60mph 3.0sec

30-70mph 2.5sec

Standing quarter mile 11.1sec at 126.5mph

70mph-0 39.5m (28deg C, dry)

3 September **No 5772**

MERCEDES-AMG GT 43 PREMIUM

★★★★☆

Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven 55 would be better still

Price £105,435

Price as tested £105,435

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Touring test economy 36.6mpg

0-60mph 4.5sec

10 September **No 5773**

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

★★★★☆

Terrific road-legal touring car vibe, but a little serious

Price £51,905

Price as tested £52,605

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

30-70mph 4.5sec

70mph-0 43.3m (22deg C, dry)

Everyday test economy 38.2mpg

Weight as tested 1417kg

17 September **No 5774**

MERCEDES-BENZ G580 WITH EQ TECHNOLOGY

★★★⯪☆

No true raison d'être but still strangely compelling

Price £154,870

Price as tested £174,855

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Weight as tested 3140kg

0-60mph 4.5sec

Average test range 209 miles

BMW's iX3 was a key debutant at a busy Munich motor show

Three disparate cars linked by a common engine

MOMENT TO FORGET
Ford Focus ST

We said goodbye to two of the all-time great hot hatchbacks this month: the Honda Civic Type R and Ford Focus ST. The Ford is out of production this year; the Honda goes soon. Cars this great deserve a suitable send-off but sometimes PR departments don't like to look back. And, with 10 days to go, the Ford PR person called and explained they now wouldn't be sending us the ST. Just because. But thanks to Focus ST owner Jim Wood, at least our test went ahead as planned. **MS**

24 September **No 5775**

POLESTAR 4 LONG RANGE SINGLE MOTOR

★★★☆☆

Desirable but something of a missed opportunity

Price £60,000

Price as tested £64,500

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Everyday test economy 3.6mpkWh

Weighted average charging rate 120kW

Cabin noise at 70mph 63dBA

24 September **No 5776**

HYUNDAI INSTER 49KWH LONG RANGE 02

★★★⯪☆

Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience

Price £26,755

Price as tested £27,255

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Everyday test economy 5.1mpkWh

Standing quarter mile 17.6sec at 81.5mph

Best cars from the past 25 years, based on blind prejudice

October

SCOOP RADICAL NEW PEUGEOT 208

AUTOCAR

NEW ASTON DBX

717bhp flagship: supercar power, SUV practicality

FOCUS ST vs TYPE R

REVEALED DACIA'S MAD CITY CAR

AUTOCAR

NEW 3 SERIES

The next era for the car that can do everything

BRIT EV RATED

THE TRUTH ABOUT USED CAR WARRANTIES

REVEALED MERC'S SHOCK NEW LOOK

AUTOCAR

RADICAL NEW FERRARI

Can they really make *the* ultimate electric supercar?

SPORTAGE GOES EV

WHAT MAKES US LOVE OUR CARS?

DRIVEN VOLVO'S ODDBALL SALOON

AUTOCAR

PORSCHE vs BMW, AUDI

Is the new Macan still the best of its breed?

CLA RATED: THE MERC THAT MUST SUCCEED

THE FOCUS HAS GONE – TRY THIS INSTEAD

SCOOP: DACIA'S MAKING AN ESTATE

VERDICT NEW 296 SPECIALE

AUTOCAR

NEW TT DRIVEN

EXCLUSIVE The future of Audi – and an icon reborn

NEW 911 'THE BEST SUPERCAR EVER'

REJOICE, IT'S A NEW MANUAL COUPE

BARGAIN OF THE YEAR? A £1000 DACIA

1 October **No 5777**

AUDI A6 E-HYBRID LAUNCH EDITION QUATTRO

★★★☆☆

A6 is spec-dependent – and misses the mark here

Price £70,455
Price as tested £70,455
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Power 295bhp
0-60mph 5.8sec
Electric test range 52 miles

8 October **No 5778**

NISSAN QASHQAI E-POWER TEKNA+

★★★★☆

Big strides for hybrid Qashqai, not least on efficiency

Price £43,210
Price as tested £43,210
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 7.6sec
Average test economy 50.4mpg
CO_2 emissions 105g/km

15 October **No 5779**

BMW 750E xDRIVE M SPORT

★★★★⯪

Look beyond its design for a highly accomplished limousine

Price £110,210
Price as tested £130,652
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Weight as tested 2472kg
Electric test range 47 miles
Average test economy 53.1mpg
30-70mph 4.2sec

15 October **No 5780**

VOLVO XC60 T8 ULTRA

★★★⯪☆

Volvo's crowd pleaser is still classy and spacious, but far from cutting edge

Price £68,860
Price as tested £69,555
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Power 449bhp
Electric test range 40 miles
Average test economy 43.3mpg

> ***Quote of the month***
>
> **"Such is the problem with customer clinics and listening to people so closely that you end up giving them something that's benchmarked on what they know already, rather than inspiring them with something new."**
>
> **Mark Tisshaw on why Citroën, among many others, could have been more daring with its mid-sized SUV**

LOOK – HERE COMES the new Aston Martin DBX S. You can't miss it. Quite aside from it being one of the most lairy, loud and wilfully extroverted cars to bear Gaydon's hallowed wings on its nose, it's also the most powerful ICE SUV in the world. A far cry from the DB5s, 7s and 9s of yore, but wholly in tune with what well-heeled sports car buyers want in 2025, and one with a V8 that makes a "dirty muscle car woofle" – which is nice. We liked it.

As we ushered in one new snarling performance hero, we also waved goodbye to two bona fide sporting icons – and with them a whole sub-genre: the ICE-powered, manual-gearboxed, front-driven hot hatchback. Our final blast in the Ford Focus ST and Honda Civic Type R was less about determining a victor than it was about celebrating and commemorating one of our favourite categories of car. Sure, the hot Civic has "touring car dynamic purpose with an engine and gearbox of true star quality", while the Focus "entertains a little more freely and at lower speeds", but the take-home verdict is that we'll miss both endlessly.

It wasn't all shouty sporting halo cars, of course. There was much to be said for the endlessly sensible Audi Q5 and its super-abstemious plug-in hybrid and James Attwood was glowing in his verdict on the newly hybridised Toyota Aygo X, having clocked an eyebrow-raising 80mpg on the test drive.

Keeping our 'real-world consumer advice' cap wedged firmly on our heads, we headed to Denmark for one of the most important group tests of the year, pitting the new, British-built Nissan Leaf against its chief rivals: the Skoda Elroq and Kia EV4. Sunderland's stalwart put up a decent fight but its Czech mate ultimately took the crown for its seamless blend of efficiency, practicality and sheer drivability.

If you weren't taken by any of those, you had only a week to wait before we tried another five entrants into the ever-growing mid-sized EV crossover class. The Toyota C-HR+ was "pleasant, if mostly conventional"; its Subaru Uncharted twin was predictably similar but brought "genuine off-road capability to the table"; the Kia EV5 was "pliant, amiable transport with few surprises"; the DS Nº4 E-Tense was a "premium but pricey" alternative to the mainstays; and the Leapmotor B10 was just "plain adequate" in most areas bar cost.

Phew! Let's take a break with a reassuringly traditional petrol hatchback – a type of car that has gone from being a mainstay of the road test pages to a fleeting anomaly. Happily, the Kia K4 – Seoul's answer to the Golf – proves that there's life in the sector yet, combining value for money with real desirability and a pleasant drive – even if its slightly staid dynamics left us pining for a tauter, naughtier GT version.

Rounding out the month was an absolutely vintage collection of first drives: Richard Lane declared the wild new Ferrari 296 Speciale "sensational on the road and worthy of the name", while Illya Verpraet got to grips with the new Honda Prelude (yes, really!) and found it to be a "quietly sporting and satisfying" hybrid coupé you would be happy to live with.

Matt Prior, meanwhile, deemed the newly electrified Porsche 911 Turbo S "the most complete supercar" around – "nothing does it better", he reckoned. And Matt Saunders was behind the wheel of another brilliant six-pot sports coupé: the BMW M2 CS. "It feels ordinary in just about no respect," he declared. And it's half the price of a 911 GT3. Winner.

FELIX PAGE

Hybrid Aygo X has "plenty of appeal", concluded Attwood

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Autocar Meets… Callum Design

Freed from corporate constraints and now running a design consultancy of his own, Ian Callum is one of the most candid and lively interview subjects. So what a privilege it was to hear him and Callum Design co-founder David Fairbairn engage in a live Q&A with Matt Prior and Steve Cropley. Topics included the duo's Skye EV, classic Minis and all the cancelled Jaguars we never got to see. The best bit? Callum's not so subtle dig at the new Jag Type 00: "Why would you build an electric car with a long bonnet on it? It's not got a V12 in there." **CM**

Lane: 296 Speciale "enhances the brilliance of the GTB"

22 October **No 5781**

CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS HYBRID 136 MAX

★★★½☆

Keen price and clever packaging, but order with care

Price £26,565

Price as tested £27,330

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Power 144bhp

Everyday test economy 54.3mpg

0-60mph 9.3sec

29 October **No 5782**

MG IM6 100 LONG RANGE

★★★½☆

The exceptional mixed with the bland and irritating

Price £47,995

Price as tested £48,540

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Power 403bhp

Average test range 299 miles

Average test economy 3.1mpkWh

30-70mph 4.0sec

MOMENT TO FORGET

Geely's UK launch

Geely offered nothing new or exciting at the UK rollout of its own-brand EV marque. Its glitzy London launch event couldn't mask the fact that the Geely EX5 is an extremely safely styled family SUV that breaks no new ground and it is set to be followed by similarly homogeneous range-mates that prioritise price and reliability above all other attributes. They will sell in their thousands, I'm sure, but Geely didn't really give a compelling reason to buy one. **FP**

Geely's UK launch and EX5? Meh

November

DRIVEN ALPINE'S MADE A MACAN
AUTOCAR
50 BEST USED SMALL CARS
Tiny hotrods from just £500
STARRING CLIO, FIESTA, POLO, JIMNY, AMI, PANDA, FIAT 500, MINI & MORE
ROAD TEST: PUG'S PROPER SUPERMINI
THE £16K MUSTANG WITH A CATCH...
BOLD NEW COROLLA

REVEALED PEUGEOT'S SHOCK 208
AUTOCAR
HERE IN 2027
NEW EVOQUE
Why it's the most crucial Rangie in years
50 YEARS OF 3 SERIES
Still the best saloon in the world

AUTOCAR
STARRING... Vanquish, M2 CS, 911 GT3, RS3, Revuelto, A290 & more
THE WORLD'S GREATEST GROUP TEST
BRITAIN'S BEST DRIVER'S CAR
Revealed 2025's most thrilling car on road and track
THE GSi IS BACK

USED GUIDE £10K RANGE ROVER
AUTOCAR
CLA BATTLES TESLA, MG
NEW MERC vs RIVALS
Can anyone make a better Tesla than Elon?
REVEALED NEW PORSCHE CAYENNE
BUT STILL BORING
AUDI'S BOLD PLAN TO DOMINATE F1

Britain's Best Driver's Car had a star cast; 911 GT3 Touring shone brightest

5 November **No 5783**

BYD SEALION 7 COMFORT

★★★☆☆

Not quite the sophisticated and swish EV it's billed as

Price £47,000
Price as tested £48,100
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
0-60mph 6.5sec
Touring test economy 2.7mpkWh
Weighted average charging rate 73kW
Second-row leg room 820mm

5 November **No 5784**

PEUGEOT 208 1.2 100PS STYLE

★★★☆☆

It's stylish and efficient but could be more memorable to drive – and ergonomic

Price £20,245
Price as tested £20,245
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Weight as tested 1122kg
Standing km 32.4sec at 100.5mph
Everyday test economy 58.7mpg

12 November **No 5785**

BMW XM 50E

★★★☆☆

Succeeds neither as a driver's car nor as a luxury SUV

Price £112,820
Price as tested £121,720
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Electric test range 57 miles
30-70mph 4.4sec
Weight as tested 2639kg
Touring test economy 25.0mpg

19 November **No 5786**

ISUZU D-MAX ARCTIC TRUCKS AT35

★★★☆☆

Noisy, slow but tough and ready for rough treatment

Price £68,326
Price as tested £77,949
ROAD TEST TOP STATS
Touring test range 475 miles
Dry braking 60-0mph 2.97sec (16deg C, damp patches)

THE PORSCHE 911 has been mentioned in previous months – and now it's going to be talked about again. Our annual 'Handling Day' contest hit the shelves in November, and after a slightly esoteric field in 2024, this year it was star-studded. Lamborghini, Ferrari, Porsche, Aston Martin and McLaren were all involved, but it was the 911 GT3 Touring that eventually pipped an Artura and 12Cilindri to victory. This was the 992-generation GT3's third victory in five years. Look, we only make the judging rules and follow them. We can't help it if one car continues to offer its driver more than any other. Legend status? Assured.

On the topic of driver's cars, Illya Verpraet drove the new Alpine A390 – a brand-defining electric crossover supposedly infused with the verve that makes the A110 such a wonderful device. Our man wasn't blown away, however. He praised the car's cabin and intuitive level of performance but wished the torque-vectoring driveline injected more swagger into the handling.

The same couldn't be said for the Hyundai Ioniq 6 N, which we drove for the first time in the UK and found to have the same extroverted handling character as its crossover sibling. It was Verpraet in the hot seat again, enjoying the ability to "custom order your drift".

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Spicy Mokka

A regular Vauxhall Mokka is not, as you'll be aware, much of a driver's car. They even give you Tesco points if you buy an electric one, for heaven's sake. So despite some talk about spring rates and new anti-roll bars and the fact that Vauxhall had bagsied us some track time, while I approached it open-mindedly, I didn't hold much hope for the GSE. Well, colour me surprised. This has a chassis balance and control that Mokka owners won't know what to do with. There is form, I suppose: they made the Zafira VXR. But still. A great driver's Vauxhall, and a crossover at that. **MP**

November was also the month we got around to celebrating the jubilee of the BMW 3 Series. We marked the occasion by bringing together a 320 of the current G20 generation with an exceptionally early 320 of the original E21 class – a car from 1975. It turned out the effects of half a century's worth of dynamic development really cannot be understated, but at the same time we seem to have regressed a little in terms of ergonomics. Who'd have thought?

And who'd indeed have thought that the 3 Series' time may now potentially be up? It's no secret that when the all-electric Neue Klasse saloon arrives as the i3 in a year or two, it will essentially replace the world's best junior executive car to date.

It will also have some stiff competition, which James Disdale was tasked with evaluating in one of the most meaningful group tests of the year: Tesla Model 3 versus Mercedes CLA versus MG IM6. Even on a conceptual level, this was an interesting affair, with an upstart, US-based disruptor taking on an old-guard European elite, and a highly advanced, China-built option also in the mix. In the end, the Tesla prevailed, though it was a close call with the CLA. Both were deemed excellent cars, so once the BMW i3 arrives, the traditional junior executive saloon class should be back to full health.

RICHARD LANE

Lane marked 50 years of the 3 Series by driving a 1975 320 and today's 320

MOMENT TO FORGET

Electric road trip

When Richard Lane asked me if he could swap his EV for my combustion-powered long-termer for the weekend, I couldn't say no: I was going to Birmingham, he to Anglesey and then France, so I'd suffer far less charging stress. Nope: this turned out to be the least pleasant road trip I'd ever had. First, my local charger refused to work; then at Beaconsfield services, Ionity and the Polestar blamed each other for a lack of communication; when I got to my mate's place with just 10% left, the nearest charger had a broken plug; and when I eventually returned home to Brighton, yet another two were out of action. "More trouble than they're worth," huffed the man at the till. **KC**

Quote of the month

"There's something of the expensive powerboat about the cross-plane woofle of the 4.0-litre V8 around idle, which seems entirely in keeping."

Matt Saunders' UK verdict on the new Aston Martin DBX S

26 November **No 5787**

GEELY EX5 MAX

★★☆☆☆

Generally acceptable but mostly mediocre transport

Price £33,240

Price as tested £33,840

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

30-70mph 5.9sec

Weighted average charging rate 94kW

Everyday test range 245 miles

Braking endurance -2.4m (fade)

26 November **No 5788**

VOLVO EX90 TWIN MOTOR AWD ULTRA

★★★⯪☆

Made of the right stuff. Needs improved range and charging to justify its price

Price £96,360

Price as tested £96,360

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Weight as tested 2770kg

Cabin noise at 50mph 57dBA

The future of the junior exec car looks like this: CLA, Model 3 and IM6

Autocar
THE LIGHT FANTASTIC
NEW PORSCHE 928S4
The Autocar
AUTOCAR
AUDI'S TESLA
ROAD TEST YEARBOOK
The Autocar
Entirely New Anglia
FORD
Autocar
DURON
BRAKE LININGS
CAR & GENERAL
Autocar
Christmas Gifts
SHOCK: NEW KIA BEATS
AUTOCAR
FIRST FOR NEWS AND REVIEWS EVERY WEEK
THEY'VE FIXED IT
NEW GTI REV
Pumped-up hot hatch tops rebo
Why this is the new Fiesta
secret Porsche rival
MORRIS
THE CAR WITH THE LOWEST UPKEEP COSTS
MOTOR UNION INSURANCE CO. LTD.
Autocar
ANCIENT & MODERN
Tested: 1896 Lutzmann
1978 Renault 5 Auto

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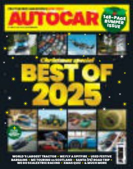
December



IT FEELS LIKE there's a bit of a driver's car vibe to December, but not in the traditional supercar/hypercar sense – nor even necessarily the fast EV world.

I wonder if it's fair to say that the industry has spent the past few years not quite knowing what's going on – these are among the most tumultuous times since the dawn of the car – and perhaps, as a result, it feels like there's something of a 'revert to type' going on.

A Porsche 718 Boxster/Cayman, planned to be all-electric, might be available with a petrol engine after all, we reported in the first issue of December. Hyundai is thinking of a new i30 N hot hatchback. But also in the electric world, the Cupra Raval prototype shows hot hatchy shades, and the BMW iX3 in this double issue is very good to drive on its entirely passive suspension – good omens for the lower, lighter i3 saloon that will follow. Meanwhile, Genesis is doing wild things with fastback estates and its Magma hypercar.

And yet, as a lover of pistons and bangs, I also find myself in the position of hoping more of these driver's cars will come with at least part-electric powertrains. As reported in our previous issue, the upcoming 'eVED' (pay-per-mile tax on electric cars) duty is likely to reduce the overall sales of EVs over the next half decade. And yet the proportions of them that manufacturers are required to sell won't change – it feels like legislators want fewer cars to be sold. Anyway, a bit more on that in my column on p16.

I was going to write that none of the above will have as much power as the Christmas road test subject, the John Deere 9RX 830 being the world's most powerful production tractor. But given the way super-estates and supercars are going these days, the Deere's 913bhp could be in trouble after all, I suppose. But none of them will challenge it for road presence. It's three metres wide and more than eight metres long and can pull a six-metre-wide 'ripper' through some of the hardest farming soil in the land.

Most potential UK consumers, I suppose as per a Genesis Magma supercar, may find that the 9RX 830 is just a little too extreme for them. But if you have the right-sized farm, by which I mean a great big one, there's nothing else quite like it.

On a somewhat smaller scale, I came away very intrigued by Felix Page's close look at the fine slot car racers from Molesey Scalextric Club. Usually, invitations to drive a racing car involve a few discussions about liability and insurance, but less so here, where seven-second lap times are in the offing. Page can't wait to go back. And I wonder if the story might have a few of us rooting around in the loft or at the back of a cupboard to dust off some controllers and slot cars over the next fortnight or so…

MATT PRIOR

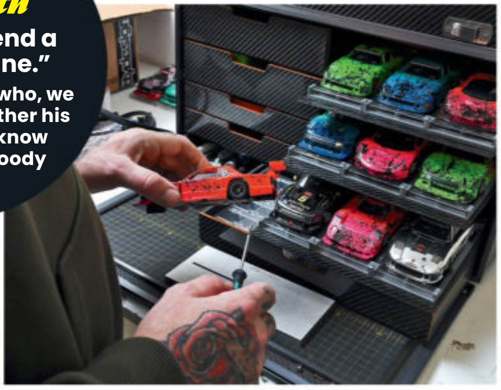
ICE is now tipped for the new Porsche 718, initially EV-only

AUTOCAR IMAGE
PR26 JMY

Quote of the month

"You can spend a bloody fortune."

A slot car racer – who, we sensed, would rather his partner didn't know he'd spent a bloody fortune



Malcolm Wilson: once a rally driver, always a rally driver

3/10 December **No 5789**

JOHN DEERE 9RX 830

★★★★★

The best way to pull large agricultural implements across big bits of ground

Price £930,000

Price as tested £930,000

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

Power 913bhp

Weight 34,473kg (base)

Width 2997mm

17/24 December **No 5790**

LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

★★★★☆

Road-racer spirit infuses an outrageous technical tour de force

Price £259,570

Price as tested £417,406

ROAD TEST TOP STATS

0-190mph 19.5sec

Weight as tested 1905kg

Standing quarter mile 10.0sec at 147.2mph

MOMENT OF THE MONTH

Lambo road test

The Temerario road test was originally planned for August. Alas, being the very first people to thoroughly test a new supercar outside of the launch event can make timings a movable feast. So you need to be agile. You also need the weather on your side. The test finally went ahead recently during a truly miserable week. Luckily, we found a six-hour window of dry running at MIRA, which was useful given the car was running at more than 190mph. Cue much relief. **RL**

MOMENT TO FORGET

Malcolm Wilson

I hopped in with rally driver turned M-Sport boss Malcolm Wilson as he took the wheel of an Aston DBX S. He wrestled it across moorland like it was a Mk2 Escort in Grizedale Forest, making it dance around long sweepers and over crests in a way that only a rally driver could. It was simply unbelievable. This falls into our 'one to forget' category for one key reason: if I didn't force myself to blank it from my mind, nothing else would seem impressive ever again. **JH**

The numbers game

Quickest, thirstiest, priciest, shortest and more besides – here's our 2025 stat attack analysis of all 74 road test cars

BAUBLES SURVIVE AT the cat's mercy, seldom-seen relatives devour your kitchen cupboards' contents, Lando-studded televisual treats aren't Norris-but Calrissian-themed and our road testing kit has earned its brief respite.

Yes, it's Christmas – and a chance to reflect on the 73 cars we scrutinised during 2025, poring over the resultant data in a Norris-celebrating manner. As in McWhirter, not McLaren's.

Cumulatively speaking, we tested cars totalling £9,247,376 this year, of which Lotus's extraordinary Evija accounted for 26% alone. Weighing 276kg shy of 148 tonnes, with a 347-metre traffic jam-generating potential – assuming a Parisian parking gap separation factor – 2025's ensemble was capable of relaying 32,175 miles of driving range.

Our model diversity hallmark remained and test subjects ranged from the Evija to Peugeot's humbler 208 (£20,245), yet none received a coveted five-star road test rating (we're excluding tractors here), compared with three last year, despite the 3.8 average score matching 2024's. How so? Twelve cars scored 4.5 stars, with 60.6% overall netting at least four. Nevertheless, a wooden spoon was dished out: newcomer Geely's EX5 propped up the league with just two stars.

It's hardly news that the Evija dominated our performance metrics, with 2013bhp and 1257lb ft on tap. What is surprising is that it didn't top all of them. Both the BMW M4 CS and Porsche 911 GTS edged it by 0.2sec from 0-30mph, while the Lamborghini Temerario took the honours from 0-60mph (0.3sec quicker, at 2.5sec) and from 30-70mph (1.8sec versus 1.9sec).

Variety was more prevalent as pace became more leisurely. Capped at 84mph, the Citroën ë-C3's top speed proved 133mph short of the Evija's 217mph maximum. From 0-60mph, the BYD Dolphin Surf's 12.0sec time was a second off what the Lotus required to crack the double-ton, while the KGM Torres's 36.6sec 0-100mph result was the slowest of those that recorded a time, 3.2sec behind Toyota's Land Cruiser in penultimate place.

Lotus Evija topped most performance metrics…

…but lost to M4 CS and 911 GTS over 0-30mph

All that go must eventually be woahed and the 911 GTS took the dry weather 70-0mph honours, requiring 38.9m of asphalt to quell its forward motion. That's 18.4m less than the last-placed Range Rover 550e. Precipitation pouring and Alpina's B3 Touring was top of the stops at 47.3m while the bottom-ranking Isuzu D-Max eventually scrubbed off all its pace 29.8m farther down the road.

We strive for balance between the glut of box-fresh EVs and combustion-engined models' continued popularity, hence 60.8% of 2025's cars were partially or wholly ICE-propelled. That tally comprised two V12s, six V8s, 11 sixes in three different cylinder configurations, a solitary five, 18 four-pots and five triples.

Just four of the 45 ICE-equipped models shunned forced induction, with a different quartet being diesel drinkers. Aft of its Parthenon-aping grille whispered 2025's largest swept capacity: the Rolls-Royce Ghost's 6749cc comfortably outranked the combined volumes of the four cars featuring Stellantis's dinky 1199cc powerplant.

A PHEV yielding the worst everyday fuel consumption of 17.1mpg seems baffling until you clock that it was the Temerario. That was less than a quarter of Dacia's petrol-parsimonious Bigster Hybrid's 72.4mpg.

EVs topped and tailed the 2025 output rankings. The Evija's power pummelled the Temerario's otherwise colossal 907bhp twice over into second, packing 23 times the grunt of the mildest BYD. While the Lotus also creamed the torque league, the ë-C3's meagre 92lb ft would struggle to de-skin a rice pudding.

Price aside, Evija owners pay for its performance might with dismal energy efficiency. Compare its 1.9mpkWh everyday figure with the Ford Puma Gen-E's 6.2mpkWh. You'll be plugging in the Lotus every 165 miles and nearing your third recharge just as Porsche's Macan Electric needs its first, at 437 miles. If you take your electricity with ICE, the otherwise mediocre Jaecoo 7 will convey you 938 miles before exhausting its reserves.

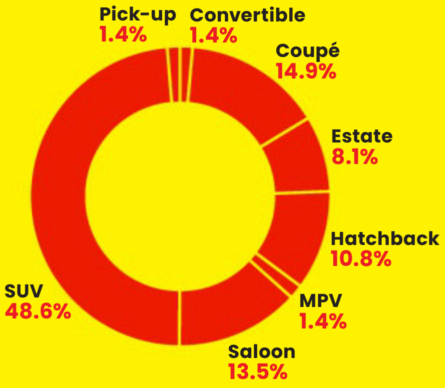
Lotus also tops the recharging roster – with the Emeya. Its 319kW average rate is seven times faster than the Dolphin Surf's 45kW figure. Still, the BYD's battery capacity is only 43.2kWh, which is just 11.4kWh greater than the Range Rover PHEV's and minuscule alongside the Mercedes EQS's 118kWh.

Another electric Benz was 2025's portliest. At 3140kg, the G580 EQ's heft equated to 2.8 Peugeot 208s, but note that at 1122kg, even the year's lightest model weighed more than a tonne.

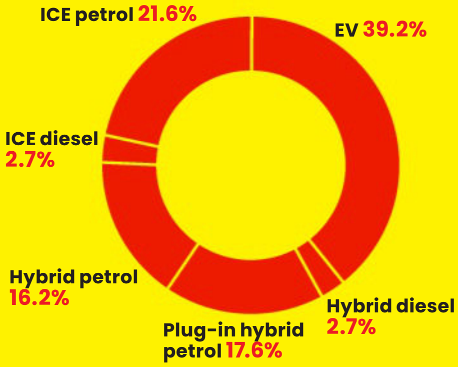
This year's results also dispelled another myth: not all EVs are serenely hushed. At a steady motorway speed, the Evija – what else? – boomed at 79dBA, noisily contrasting with the ethereal Ghost's 59dBA. Mind you, who'd complain if Father Christmas left the key to either under the tree?

KEITH JONES

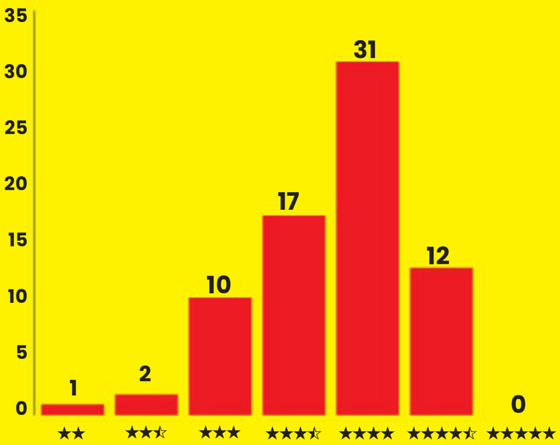
BODYSTYLES



POWERTRAINS



STARS AWARDED



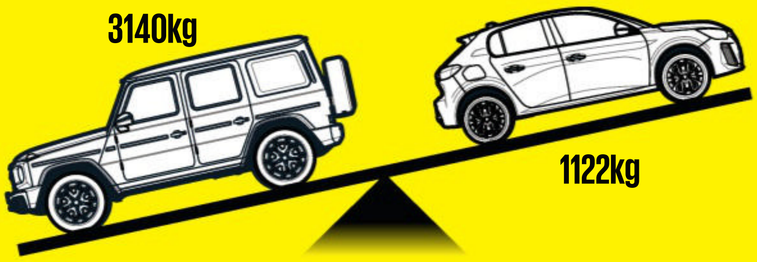
AVERAGE ICE CAR

Price £108,014
Engine 5 cyls in line, 2662cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 381bhp
Torque 402lb ft
Gearbox 7-spd automatic, 4WD
Weight as tested 1925kg
0-60mph as tested 5.8sec
0-100mph as tested 14.8sec
30-70mph in fourth 6.9sec
Top speed 150mph
Average test economy 34.5mpg
Average test range 449 miles

AVERAGE EV CAR

Price £151,267
Motor One front and one rear, 4WD
Power 406bhp
Torque 434lb ft
Battery Lithium ion (NMC), 79.9kWh (usable)
Weight as tested 2107kg
0-60mph as tested 6.0sec
0-100mph as tested 12.7sec
Top speed 126mph
Average test economy 3.0mpkWh
Average test range 224 miles
Average charging rate 134kW

WEIGHT



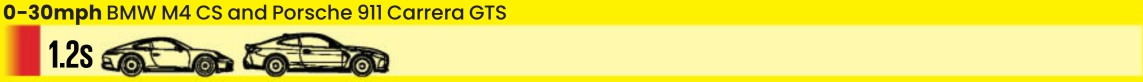
Heaviest
Mercedes-Benz G580 with EQ Technology

Lightest
Peugeot 208 1.2 100PS Style

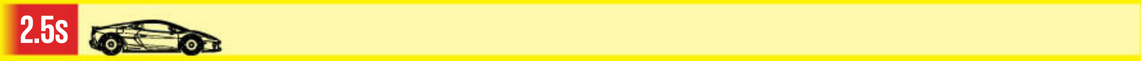
ACCELERATION

FASTEST

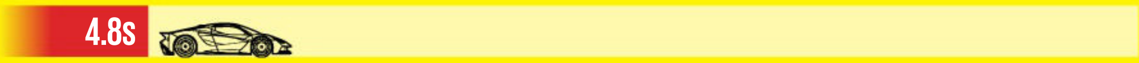
0-30mph BMW M4 CS and Porsche 911 Carrera GTS



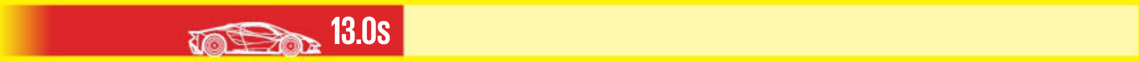
0-60mph Lamborghini Temerario



0-100mph Lotus Evija

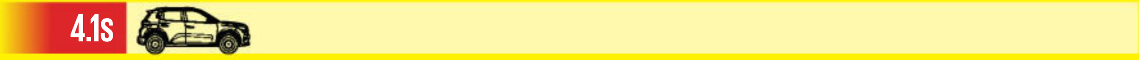


0-200mph Lotus Evija

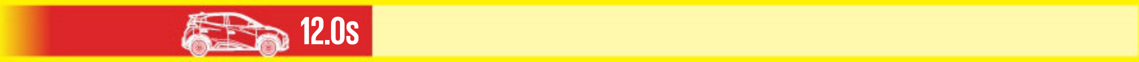


SLOWEST

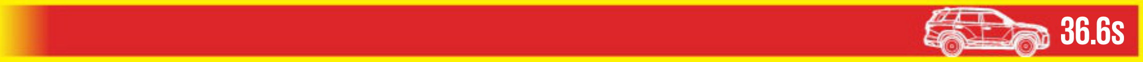
0-30mph Citroën ë-C3 Max



0-60mph BYD Dolphin Surf

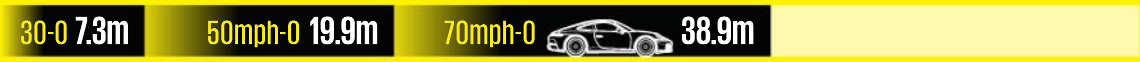


0-100mph KGM Torres 1.5T K40 AWD

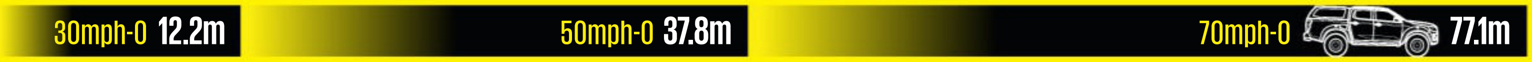


BRAKING

Best Porsche 911 Carrera GTS (8deg C, dry)



Worst Isuzu D-Max Arctic Trucks AT35 (16deg C, wet)



BANG FOR BUCK RATIO

Power-to-weight ratio divided by price as tested
2025 test car mean average = 0.247bhp per tonne per pence

TOP 5

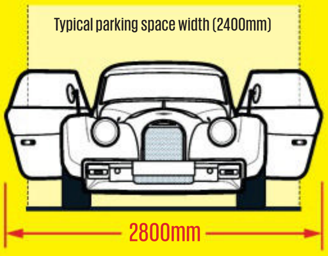
MG ZS Hybrid+ Trophy
0.547bhp per tonne per pence
Peugeot 208 1.2 100PS Style
0.449bhp per tonne per pence
Mini John Cooper Works
0.436bhp per tonne per pence
Honda Civic Type R
0.432bhp per tonne per pence
Skoda Octavia Estate vRS
0.431bhp per tonne per pence

BOTTOM 5

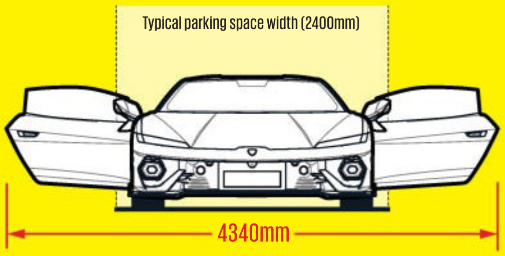
Lotus Evija
0.044bhp per tonne per pence
Rolls-Royce Ghost Series II Black Badge
0.070bhp per tonne per pence
Isuzu D-Max Arctic Trucks AT35
0.094bhp per tonne per pence
Mercedes-Benz G580 with EQ Technology
0.103bhp per tonne per pence
Bentley Flying Spur Speed First Edition
0.103bhp per tonne per pence

DOOR SPAN

Narrowest Morgan Supersport

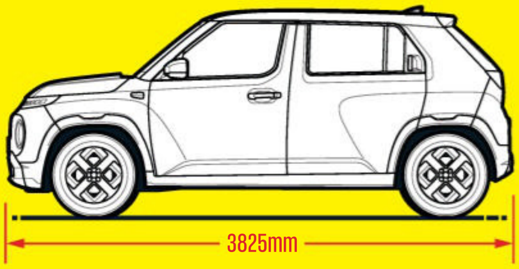


Widest Lamborghini Temerario

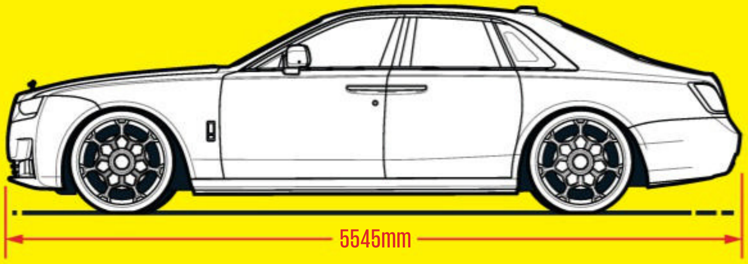


LENGTH

Shortest Hyundai Inster 49kWh Long Range 02



Longest Rolls-Royce Ghost Series II Black Badge



PETER LIDDIARD

Hold the front page

In a tumultuous year, automotive news stories have been big in global scale and local importance. **WILL RIMELL** recaps

Even by the standards of recent years, 2025 has been a turbulent one for the car industry.

For many automotive giants, particularly those in Europe, the number of different issues they're having to address at one time has pushed them into panic mode and the hurried rewriting of long-term plans.

A prime illustration of this is the rollercoaster that has been the electric vehicle market in 2025. At the start of the year, the growth in EV sales had started to stall due to increasing resistance from consumers. As a result, many car makers pivoted and committed to keeping combustion models on sale for longer. Meanwhile, governments set on increasing uptake were prompted to bring back EV incentives. In response, EV sales have hit record levels in the UK.

There was also the chaos arising from a host of trade wars sparked by US president Donald Trump; the continued aggressive expansion of state-backed Chinese brands into the European market; significant movement among key positions at the top car giants, with some influential figures leaving the industry; and the cyber attack that incapacitated JLR for six weeks and caused nearly £2 billion of damage to the whole UK economy.

The motor show returns: September's Munich show was the biggest automotive event since the Covid pandemic as 15 cars were revealed, including the much anticipated BMW iX3.

JLR GOES QUIET

The British car maker was hit by one of the biggest cyber attacks in both automotive and UK business history on 1 September. It came around six months after a significant attack on Marks & Spencer and was reportedly conducted by the same group of hackers.

The attack infiltrated JLR's internal systems so, in an effort to protect any sensitive data, the company shut them down – which meant all global operations came to an abrupt halt. This included production lines, dealerships, shipping, aftersales and more.

The process of rebuilding the systems and getting back online was, according to JLR, a bigger job than expected and the car maker remained offline for more than six weeks before production restarted fully on 16 October. The shutdown resulted in sales to dealers plummeting by a quarter.

The attack cost JLR half a million pounds in profit, with estimates suggesting it caused £1.9 billion of damage to the wider British economy – enough to drop 0.1% off September's gross domestic product figure.

That's because the attack had an impact not just on JLR but also many of the company's suppliers, several of which came close to bankruptcy as a consequence. Such were the issues that the UK government said it would guarantee a £1.5bn loan to JLR to help it support suppliers.

Although JLR has the financial weight to withstand the crisis, it is a wake-up call to the entire industry of the damage that a major cyber attack can do.

FUTURE EVs PUT ON ICE

Stalling EV sales – and the struggle to sell EVs profitably – plus the continued demand for combustion cars caused anxiety in the top ranks of Europe's car makers. So much so that many pulled back from previous commitments to phase out their combustion models in the near future – most notably Audi, Porsche and Volvo.

Porsche was an instructive case, because the decision to row back from some of its EV plans resulted in a £6.65 billion hit, due to the axing of a planned range-topping EV and the investment in a new ICE Macan successor and new combustion versions of the 718 Boxster and Cayman.

Given that president Donald Trump's policies in the US scrapped many of that market's incentives to sell EVs and there is continued customer resistance, it's understandable car firms want to give themselves flexibility. But maintaining the development of multiple powertrain systems remains a major challenge for car makers too.

TRUMP vs THE WORLD

On 20 January 2025, Donald Trump was inaugurated as US president for his second term. Just 24 days later, he announced sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs on almost every world market, hiking import levies on a host of materials and products – including a blanket 27.5% import fee on cars.

Makers such as JLR, whose biggest market is the US, froze imports for just over a month as government lawyers battled to bring the tariffs down. Although JLR did accelerate exports to the US before the tariffs kicked in, its profits for January to March dropped by half.

In May, UK and US officials agreed a new 10% tariff for the first 100,000 UK-made vehicles exported to the US each year, rubber-stamping it in June. PM Keir Starmer called it "a very important day" for both countries. The US is the UK car industry's second-largest export market, after the EU. It received 27% of all UK-made vehicles in 2024 and is worth £9 billion a year.

Over the Channel, the European Union was fighting a much more heated battle with Trump. After a three-month-long slanging match, the two finally came to an agreement on 1 August, with EU-made cars incurring a 15% tariff when exported to the US. Trump called the agreement "the biggest of all the deals" and one that was "great for cars".

Notable in all this is that Chinese imports into the US remain subject to prohibitive 100% tariffs, effectively closing the US off to those manufacturers – which explains, in part, why so many are expanding aggressively in Europe.

Nissan had a difficult 2025 and confirmed it would cull 20,000 jobs (250 at Sunderland) and close seven plants globally in a bid to claw back a £3.8bn net loss in 2024-25.

BC74 FUF
BP25 NYZ

SOFTER APPROACH TO THE ZEV MANDATE

For the UK arms of car companies, the biggest challenge in 2025 was one they faced last year: hitting mandated electric car sales targets. In 2024, EVs made up 19.6% of the market, compared with a target – give or take some complex offsets – of 22%.

Instead of fining the makers that missed their targets – originally set at £12,000 per non-compliant car – the UK government offered a reprieve and said it would listen to the industry and made some significant changes to the rulebook.

Perhaps the most notable outcome was to provide clarity that full-hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles could be sold until 2035 rather than 2030 (reverting to a previous interpretation of the rules) in an effort to "ease the transition and give the industry more time to prepare".

But the annual targets remain, and in 2025 car firms were required to achieve a 28% sales mix of EVs. At the time of writing, the mix was around 22%, with several car firms again furiously reading the small print to avoid fines.

GETTY IMAGES

BIG AUTUMN BUDGET FOR CARS

In November, chancellor Rachel Reeves revealed a host of vehicle-related reforms in one of the most anticipated budgets of the decade.

Most notable was the government's plan to bring in a new pay-per-mile road tax for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. Reeves said this was part of an effort to bridge the gap in fuel duty revenues caused by the transition away from combustion cars and "because all cars contribute to the wear and tear on our roads".

The proposed charge is 3p per mile for EVs and 1.5p for PHEVs. Critics lambasted it, calling it the "wrong move at the wrong time", given the pressure on car makers from the ZEV mandate.

The government also said it will extend the 5p fuel duty freeze until next September – but will then begin to reverse it. The move is expected to raise more than £70 billion by 2029.

In addition, Reeves raised the luxury tax threshold for EVs from £40k to £50k, confirmed a review was under way over public charging rates, banned "premium" brands from the Motability scheme and delayed planned changes to employee car ownership schemes until 2030.

The ongoing tech revolution ramped up this year, from solid-state batteries and the testing of driverless cars in the UK to the introduction of steer-by-wire.

SMALL EVs BECAME A 2025 TREND

If 2024 was the year the small car returned with Renault's 5 and 4, then 2025 was when the rest of the market decided to join the fight.

Leading the second wave was the Volkswagen Group, which showed off the members of its so-called 'Electric Urban Car Family'. This included the VW ID Polo, Skoda Epiq, Cupra Raval (right) and production version of the VW ID Every1.

Honda also weighed in with the Super-N, a kei car-sized EV with a simulated gearshift system that will be offered in the UK.

Then Nio's Firefly brand confirmed plans to bring over its eponymous 141bhp rival to the 5.

And while all the others were scrabbling for market position and magazine coverage, Renault finally launched its new Twingo EV – priced at around £17,000.

GLOBAL
MOTIVE
DRIVER
ID.POLO

A growing semiconductor shortage threatened to bring Europe's production lines to a standstill in October. Caused by a dispute between Donald Trump, Dutch authorities and China, the crisis was finally averted at the end of November.

TESLA'S BUMP IN THE ROAD

Thanks to its boss Elon Musk, Tesla is rarely far from the headlines. And 2025 was, as ever, a rollercoaster, with interest starting to wane in its ageing line-up. Its downturn was compounded by a big drop in sales in China, where buyers moved to newer models from domestic firms, which resulted in Tesla posting one of its heaviest quarter losses in a decade.

Such were its difficulties that Musk warned he was expecting the brand to enter one of the most challenging periods in its history.

That said, Musk might have played some part in the firm's struggles. His close ties with US president Donald Trump and visible role in the Department of Government Efficiency alienated many fans, leading to protests outside Tesla stores worldwide.

Predictably, the Trump-Musk relationship quickly soured when the president introduced a new bill that rolled back the emissions mandate and EV credits. Musk claims that was directly responsible for a $154 million (£116m) hit to Tesla's second-quarter revenue.

To combat its downturn, Tesla went on the offensive, launching a heavily updated Model Y SUV and stripped-backed versions of the SUV and Model 3 saloon, badged Standard, in a bid to drive up sales.

EVERYONE
HATES ELON

EV BUYING INCENTIVES RETURN

The UK government announced in July that it was reintroducing grants for electric cars in an effort to incentivise sales as demand weakens yet mandated emissions targets continue to rise.

The new Electric Car Grant arrived three years after the Plug-in Car Grant was axed.

In order to qualify for the ECG, a model line must be priced below £37,000 and not exceed £42,000 and there are two levels of grant available: £1500 and £3750.

Eligibility is determined using a set of technical and sustainability criteria, which largely hinge on the environmental credentials of the car's main components – taking into account the impact of sourcing, production and shipping.

The criteria penalise models that are made in countries that pump out high emissions, which essentially excludes cars built in Asia. So far, more than 40 EVs have been confirmed as eligible for the grant.

The introduction of the incentives resulted in a boom in EV sales in September, with 72,779 EVs leaving forecourts – a monthly record – of which 20,000 came through the ECG.

McLAREN'S SHOCK FORSEVEN MERGER

News that McLaren was merging with EV start-up Forseven – a story Autocar broke in April – was a bombshell. Orchestrated by mutual investor CYVN Holdings, the deal was intended to help financially struggling McLaren expand into new segments, namely SUVs, and give tech-focused Forseven a shortcut to market. The merger created McLaren Group Holdings and Forseven boss Nick Collins was installed as its CEO.

GETTY IMAGES

A Lotus to save Hethel

Lotus has endured torrid times. Could a new sports EV in the mould of past greats be its saviour? **STEVE CROPLEY** thinks so

> *"A real Lotus is low, sporty and compact, with a stance that implies fine driving qualities"*

Car lovers know a true Lotus when they see one. The brand's core values are among the clearest of any marque on the road, harking back nearly 80 years to the earliest days of Colin Chapman.

A real Lotus is low, sporty and compact, with a confident stance that implies fine driving qualities. The exterior shape may not always be consistent with that of its predecessors (look at the differences between the Elan and the Esprit for evidence of that), but the styling always carries a delicacy that speaks of low weight, compactness, efficiency and a forward-thinking openness to new technology.

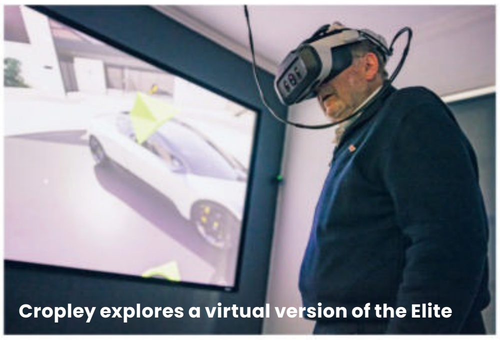
From 1965 to 2022, every new Lotus embodied these values and was built in Lotus's Hethel factory, opened when Chapman acquired a former RAF base south of Norwich and moved the business there so it could have its own test track. Lotus life moved on, often through thick and thin, because, throughout its eight decades, the company's affairs have always been volatile.

This year that volatility peaked. Four years before, Geely, Lotus's Chinese owner, had started applying the marque's famous yellow roundel to a range of UK-designed, Wuhan-built, large EVs unlike any Lotus before. Having aimed at 150,000 units per year, Geely found it could sell only a small fraction of that number, and it drew criticism for misunderstanding the soul of Lotus while confusing customers and loyalists about the company's future.

Meanwhile, the Hethel-built Emira sports car, the Evora-based current model billed at its 2022 launch as the last-ever combustion-engined Lotus, had been selling moderately well (5000-plus units in 2024) but not well enough for the Chinese ownership. Even slower sales by rivals such as Alpine's A110 indicated that mid-priced two-seater sports cars simply weren't as fashionable as they used to be.

To make matters worse, tough new American import tariffs began decimating Hethel sales and even caused Geely to talk about moving Emira production to the US. Lotus staff numbers were slashed; irreplaceable managers were 'let go'. There were even suggestions (until the UK government intervened) that Hethel would close – a huge blow to the UK's reputation as a maker of specialist cars. The situation calmed a little when Geely hurriedly produced assurances that ▸

Jonathan Gould (left) and Chris Gould of Avant



Cropley explores a virtual version of the Elite

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

◂ Hethel would remain as Lotus's sports car headquarters. But the threat still hovers, and current Emira production, slow and sometimes stationary, is far from economic.

So what next? Feeling acutely aware of the disaster that could follow the loss of Lotus's most important base in the UK, we at Autocar wondered if there was anything we could do beyond reporting the news and expressing regrets. After discussion, we decided that one bold route to profitability could be to launch a sister model for the Emira that, if specified correctly, might draw buyers from the tariff-free markets of Europe and move Hethel closer to capacity and profitability.

We alighted on a proposal for a sporty but practical Lotus 2+2 EV, more of a family-friendly 'daily driver' than the Emira but still around Emira size, because that's part of the family DNA. It would have Emira-level performance and dynamics, too, but would be an EV because, as well as being the powertrain of the future, the latest electric powertrain developments promise a spacious and accessible cabin even in such a compact car.

We reckoned that by the time our car would be ready (estimated to be 2028), it could have strong buyer appeal in the UK and Europe (the world's third-biggest car market, running to 12 million units per year), especially as EV sales keep rising and tariffs aren't a problem in the region. But what would such a car be like?

To explore this crucial question, we gathered a small team of top British designers and engineers to propose their version of a car to save Hethel, with Autocar as the client. Alas, they were given only four weeks to create it – an impossibly short time in practice – but they accepted the challenge with alacrity. What follows is nothing less than a comprehensive picture of British ingenuity.

CHOOSING A NAME

Believing firmly that, for an emotional car like this, an early name choice helps define the product, we had one ready. We chose Elite, a distinguished Lotus name that has been used before, just as Elan and Esprit have been.

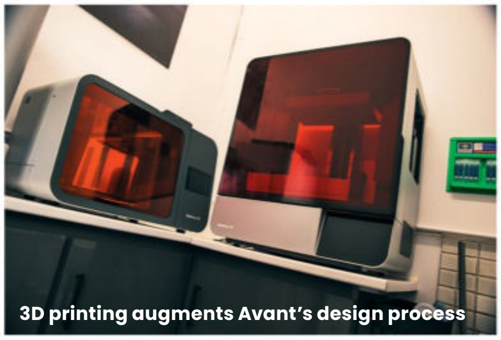
The logic was clear: a familiar name would win instant attention. We've never warmed to the recent Lotus practice of rifling the dictionary for ever less relevant 'E-names' when famous handles languished on the shelf. Rather than opting for Expunge or Extant, the new Elite could draw direct influence from the lightness of the Type 14 'eggshell' Elite of 1957 while learning lessons in space efficiency from the compact 2+2 Type 75 'wedge' Elite of 1974.

This new car would be the Elite Type 130-something of 2028, the first Lotus 2+2 since the Excel popped its clogs in 1992 – and the first approachable Hethel-built EV ever, leaving aside Lotus's Evija billionaire's special of 2019 and Tesla's pioneering, electrified, Elise-based Roadster of 2008.

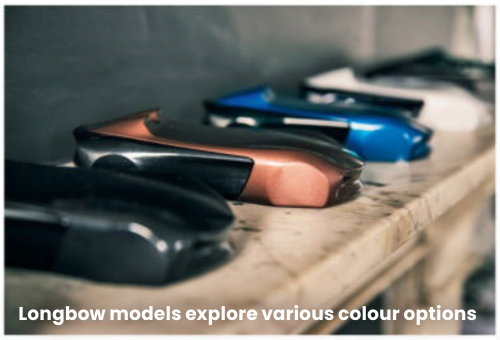
THE DESIGNERS

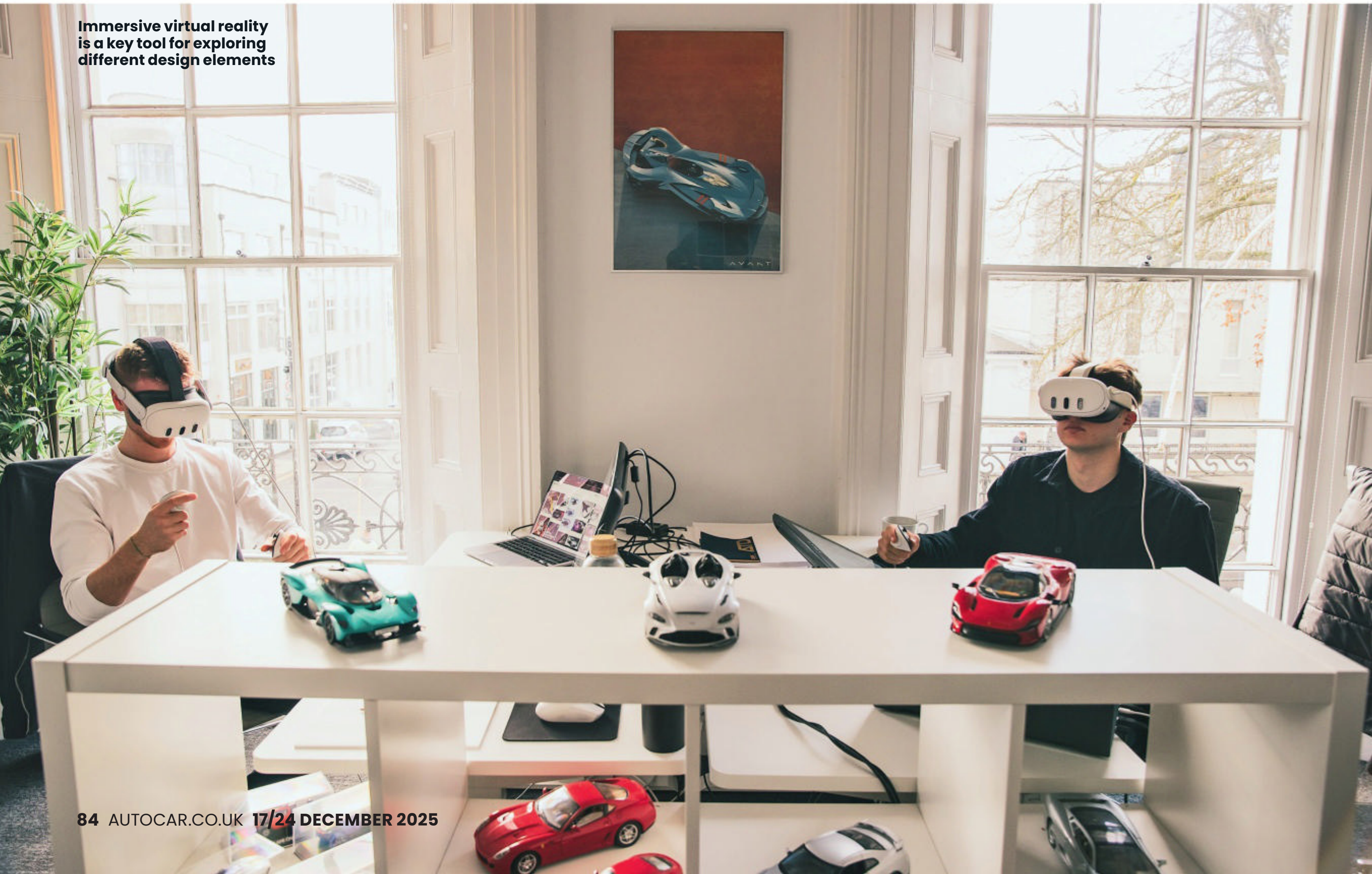
Avant Design of Leamington Spa was our instant choice to lead our Elite S4 project. It's an independent father-and-son business established in 2018 by the hugely experienced designer Jonathan Gould, soon joined in the company by his designer son Chris as design director.

The special skill of Avant's seven in-house designers is their command of the latest generation of digital design tools. These skills, already well deployed in the new Longbow 'featherweight' sports EV, made them uniquely able to tackle our project through phases such as research (which were the relevant cars, past and present?), branding (what kind of design suited modern Lotus values?), colour and material choices and, of course, top-class 2D and 3D

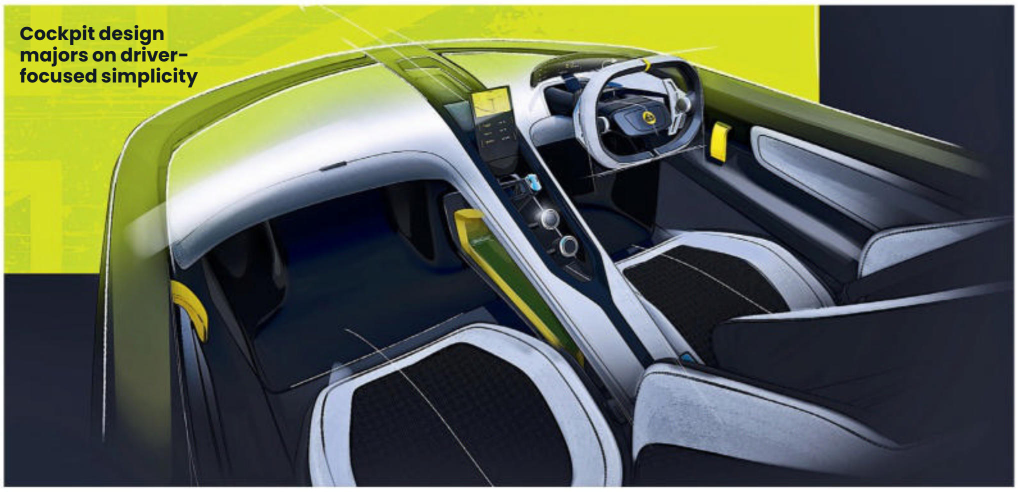

3D printing augments Avant's design process

Design reference library informs and inspires


Longbow models explore various colour options


Immersive virtual reality is a key tool for exploring different design elements

> *"Avant created a car from our loose brief, choosing the best from dozens of their team's alternatives"*


Cockpit design majors on driver-focused simplicity

rendering. In practically no time, they created a car from our loose brief, choosing the best from literally dozens of their own team's alternatives.

The basis of this car was to be a highly versatile version of an all-British EV 'skateboard' chassis called PACES, developed by Cornwall-based Watt Electric Vehicles. It's an aluminium structure comprising specially shaped (and patented) extrusions that self-jig and can be assembled accurately and economically in small numbers with no need for an elaborate factory.

Watt EV founder Neil Yates and his chief technical officer Bob Mustard have adapted their structure from delivery vans to sports cars, including the Longbow. Watt and Avant also have an extensive history of working harmoniously together to deliver 'turnkey' vehicles – a key part of any time-limited programme. Their well-honed partnership was perfect for our job.

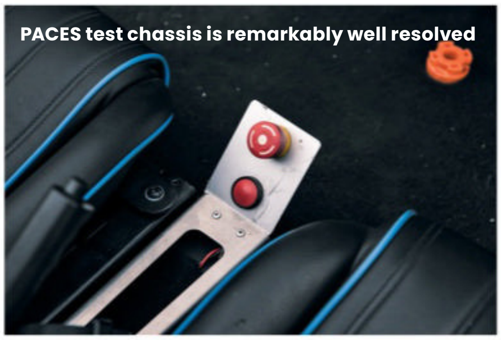
Avant's team not only produced the superb concept you see here but also used their own new-tech virtual reality studio to view proposed versions from every conceivable angle. Then they checked the package by virtually climbing inside it to assess the interior.

Here are the key characteristics of the Elite S4 we visualised:

- A low, sleek and stylish but cleverly packaged EV, similar in exterior dimensions to the Alpine A110, about 4.2 metres long and 1.8 metres wide.
- Avant's own concept of a modern Lotus, not copying a specific model but incorporating clear hints about its provenance.
- A sports coupé capable of housing two adults, two kids and a compact rear-mounted, rear-drive electric powertrain, with luggage space.
- Wide doors to provide easy access for front occupants and possibly smaller doors for the rear passengers. ▸

Watt EV PACES structure uses patented design

Our Elite will use double-wishbone suspension


PACES test chassis is remarkably well resolved

■ A space-efficient and uncomplicated control/fascia layout, sporting in character, with an emphasis on driving ease and precision.

Avant’s creation, to our eye, captured the soul of an Elite daily driver, with impressively spacious accommodation, unique design features (such as its beautiful central spine), decent head room and a forward-control cabin that occupied much of the generous wheelbase while retaining an ultra-sporting character. All this with lightness, compactness and modernity implied by its surfaces and lines.

We were delighted – and especially with the door designs, a pair of large, upward-opening scissor doors for front passengers (Jonathan Gould has a strong liking for the ‘theatre’ when they open) and a neat pair of rear ‘dickey doors’ to ease rear access.

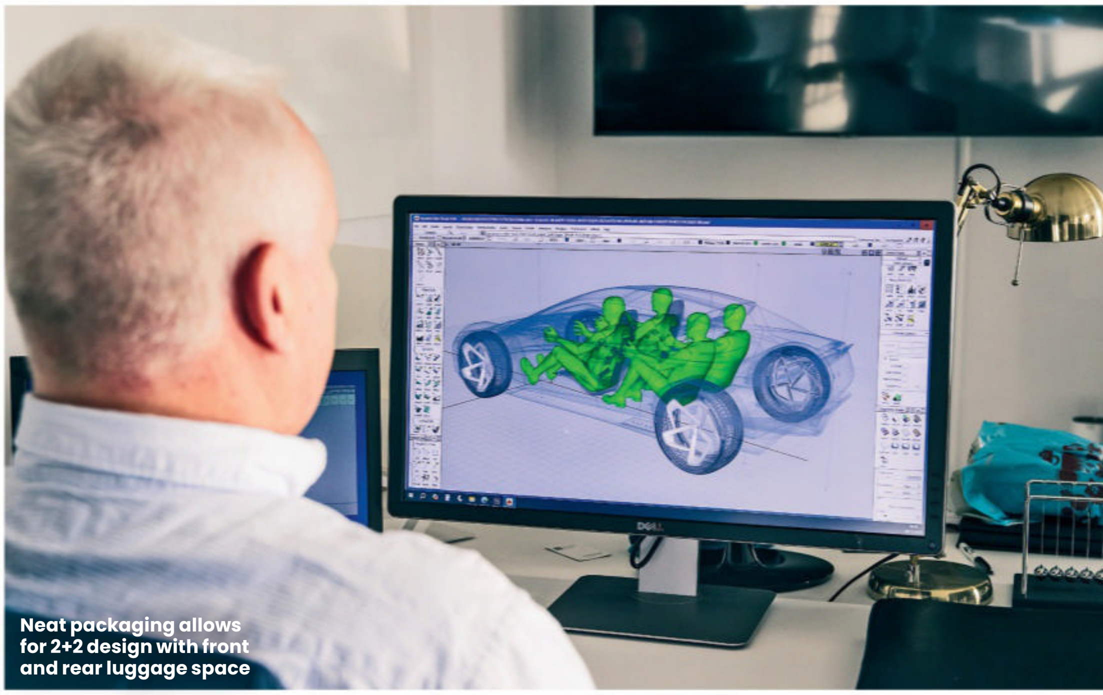
THE ENGINEERS

We have encountered Yates, Mustard and their modular PACES platform in previous applications, but the whole thing has moved on. Their skateboard designs were much refined in design and changed in scale and variety.

The clue to the Watt platform’s unique nature is in the name: Passenger And Commercial EV Skateboard. The versatility flows mostly from the unique use of patented, self-locking extrusions, but PACES’ other big-note feature is the way it incorporates a battery in an integral and virtually crashproof enclosure that saves weight, adds rigidity and avoids adding the structural height that is commonly a problem. PACES can support front-, rear- or four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Business expansion at Watt has recently driven the need for a second factory at Pinvin, near Pershore in Worcestershire, much closer than Cornwall to potential clients in the Midlands –

> “Providing the ideal specification for individual projects is the point of the PACES chassis”


Neat packaging allows for 2+2 design with front and rear luggage space

2027 LOTUS ELITE S4
Engine Two in-wheel electric motors, one in each rear wheel
Power 470bhp
Gearbox Two epicyclic 1-spd reduction gear, one in each rear wheel
Kerb weight 1250kg
0-62mph 3.6sec
Top speed 130mph
Charging system 800V
Battery 72kWh
Estimated range 375 miles
Length 4250mm
Width 1865mm
Wheelbase 2650mm
Height 1275mm
Drag 0.23
Suspension Double wishbones, coils, electronically adjustable dampers
Tyres 255/35 R20

Watt EV boss Yates (right) gives Cropley a go

The PACES structure is strong and versatile

although demand is also growing from foreign customers. A low-volume 'white-label' vehicle factory capable of building 200 units per year is on the way, and even bigger news could follow once the finance is in place.

As soon as we started talking to Yates, it became clear that the chassis he proposed for our Elite S4 would be unique in all key dimensions (length, width, track and wheelbase), because providing the ideal specification for individual projects is the point of PACES. Our all-independent, double-wishbone suspension would be unique to the Elite, as would its motors (in-wheel rear units each making 235bhp) and its 72kWh battery, forecast to give a generous 375-mile cruising range along with quick charging courtesy of an 800V electrical system.

As proof of PACES' versatility, we were even able to take a trip in a living, driving skateboard – one they made earlier – complete with instruments and remarkably comfortable seats. The motor was nothing special, said Yates, but devoid of a body it still went like the wind – and it felt as if, with a pair of trade plates, we could have taken it away for the weekend.

The panel at the top right of this page summarises the mechanical specification that Yates and co devised and which they are convinced they could deliver. Note the compact dimensions, plus the low height and weight for a well-proportioned 2+2.

As we move towards Christmas, the Avant-Watt-Autocar Lotus Elite S4 looks pretty good at carrying people, but above all it looks like a great car to drive.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

What won't happen is a call from Geely's bosses right after Christmas with design and technical briefs for Avant Design and Watt Electric, plus a spot on the advisory team for Yours Truly. More realistic is a hope, in places where Autocar is seen, for a modestly increased realisation that:

- Hethel must be saved so that it can build in-character Lotus sports cars for the long term.
- Prodigious talent is as available as ever in small, creative, fast-moving UK companies such as Avant and Watt EV, well capable of creating new cars just as good as the classics of the past.
- Correctly created and configured, EVs can be the great driver's cars of the future.
- The case for sports cars is as strong as ever, but they must meet the true needs of the market. Let's hope it can happen.

Motoring myth-busting

The car world is full of commonly held beliefs that seem too good to be true. **JAMES ATTWOOD** sorts fact from fiction

The Ford Model T was offered only in black FICTION

There are few quotes more famous in motoring than Henry Ford describing the styling options for the Model T: "Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black." But that's not strictly true, or at least it wasn't when Ford said it to his eponymous company's management team in 1909, because it wasn't a statement of fact – it was a request.

At that stage, the Model T was offered in four different hues, none of which was black. From 1908 until 1911, different variants of the car were available in grey, green, red and blue. In 1912, all cars were painted a dark blue with black bumpers, before the all-black Model T arrived in 1914 – which was then made the only option for the next 11 years.

Why black? That's not entirely clear, but the common theory is that Ford felt it was cheaper, more durable and dried faster than other colours – although there's no evidence for that final part.

Another fun fact: there wasn't actually a singular black. More than 30 different formulations of black paint were applied to Model Ts during its famous production run.

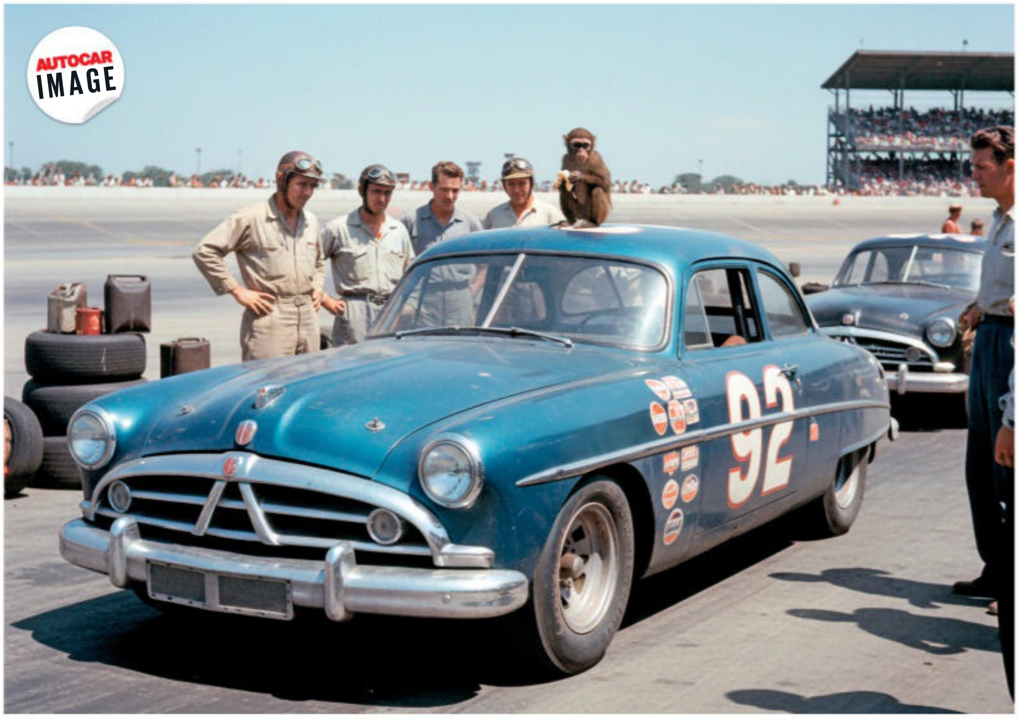
A monkey once won a Nascar race *FACT*

Tim Flock was an early star of Nascar racing, winning the first of two Grand National titles in 1952 driving a Hudson Hornet run by Ted Chester. Early the following year, Chester was in a pet shop when he spotted a rhesus monkey who, according to a tag on his cage, was named Jocko. The PR-savvy Chester spotted an opportunity, and a few weeks later Flock gained a co-driver: the newly renamed Jocko Flocko, who sat in a special seat, mounted high in the car, wearing a race suit and helmet.

And this wasn't just a one-off gimmick: Jocko Flocko took part in eight races alongside Tim, including a dominant victory at Hickory Speedway in North Carolina. But a few races later he escaped his cage mid-race and, panicked, ended up jumping on Flock and scratching him, prompting an extra pit stop that cost the pair a second-place finish.

"I had to pit to get that monkey off my back," recounted Flock – perhaps the only time that phrase has been used entirely literally.

Jocko Flocko never raced again.



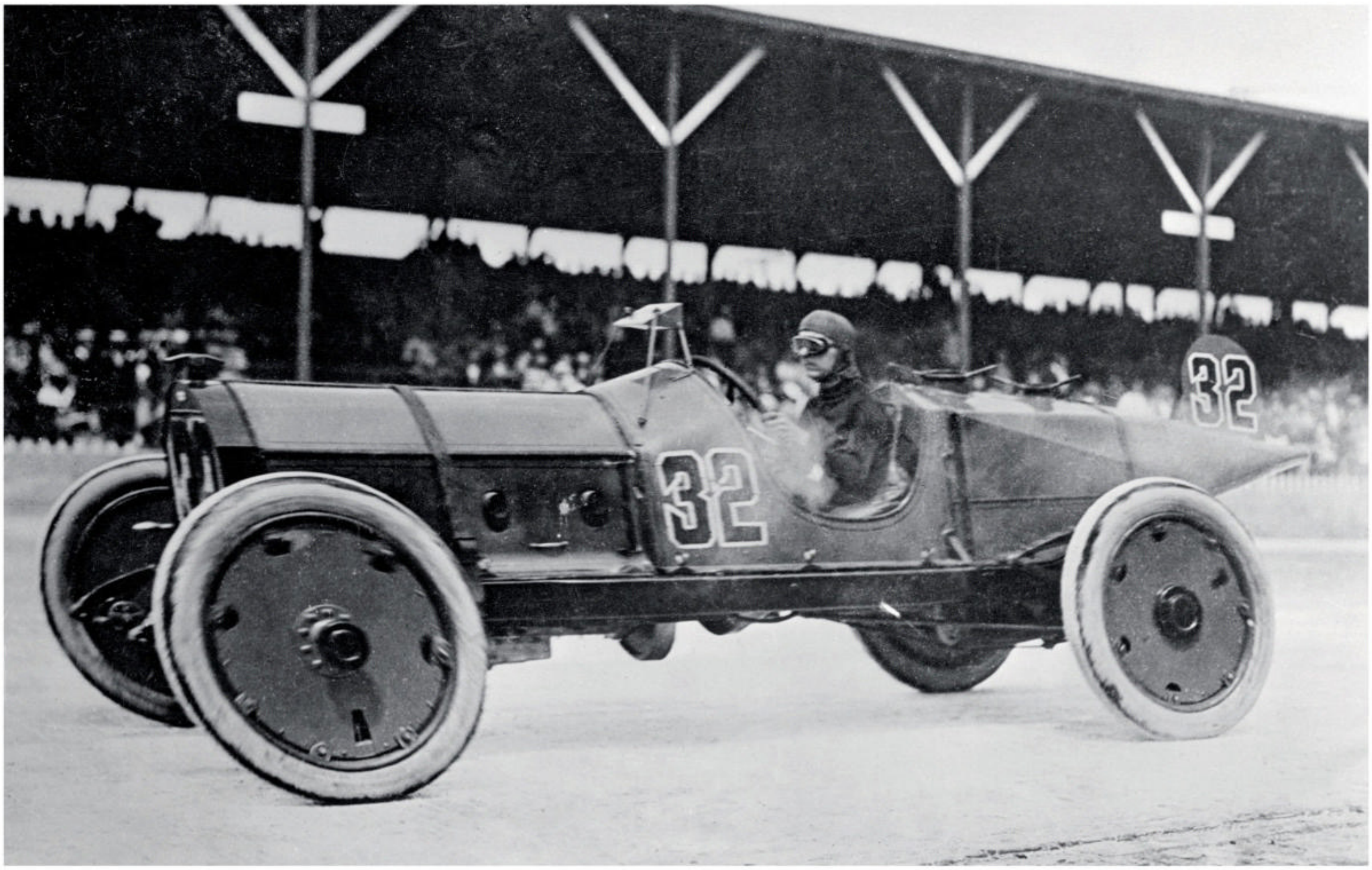
The first Indianapolis 500 winner invented the rear-view mirror *FICTION*

One of the stars of early American motorsport, Ray Harroun was nicknamed the Little Professor for his ingenuity in helping develop the Marmon Wasp single-seater that he raced in the inaugural Indianapolis 500-Mile Sweepstakes in 1911.

The original rules stipulated that cars had to carry a ride-on mechanic – in part to keep an eye on any rivals coming up from behind. Harroun didn't want to carry the extra weight, so his solution was to fix a mirror to his car and then convince officials that he should be allowed to race without a mechanic. They eventually agreed and Harroun took victory – and is now often credited with inventing the rear-view mirror.

Except he didn't. You can find references to attachable mirrors being offered in the UK in Autocar from as early as 1906, and there are similar examples from the era in the US, France and elsewhere.

Elmer Berger is sometimes credited with inventing the rear-view mirror, but he was merely the first to patent it, in 1921. And the name he chose suggests it was intended for a specific purpose: it was called the Cop-Spotter.



The speed camera was invented to help drivers go faster FACT

Maurice Gatsonides was a successful rally driver (he won the 1953 Monte Carlo Rally in a Ford Zephyr), but his lasting automotive legacy can be seen on motorways and A-roads all over the country, much to the chagrin of millions of motorists. Because Gatsonides invented the speed camera.

Gatsonides, a handy inventor when he wasn't rallying, in fact didn't set out to encourage drivers to go slower; he actually devised the speed camera trying to find a way to teach himself to go faster.

In 1958, he founded the Gatso company and launched the first speed measuring device for vehicles. By painting lines on the road ahead of a fixed camera that was set off when a vehicle passed it at speed, Gatsonides was able to record how fast he was going incredibly accurately, allowing him to work out where time could be found.

It didn't take long to work out that a device that accurately measured how fast a car was going would be very interesting to law enforcement, who rather took to the Gatso cameras, mounted in the UK in those big yellow boxes.

Still, if you've been caught by a Gatso camera (or, more likely these days, ANPR average-speed cameras), you're not alone. Gatsonides admitted that he was fined several times after being caught by his own invention "because I love speeding".

TEXACO
DUBONNET
BOSCH
elf
STEWART
5
GOODYEAR

Tyrrell Racing still competes in Formula 1 FACT

Ken Tyrrell started his own racing team in 1958, and it contested its first Formula 1 grand prix in 1966. Initially using customer Matra chassis, Tyrrell Racing eventually became a constructor in its own right and, with the brilliant Jackie Stewart driving, claimed three drivers' titles and one constructors' title between 1969 and 1973.

The Surrey-based team became known for both technical innovation, such as the P34 six-wheeler of 1976, and creative interpretation of the rules: the team was disqualified from the entire 1984 season after it was found to be running its cars underweight, then topping up their brake cooling systems with water containing lead.

As F1 budgets ramped up, Tyrrell slipped down the grid, and in 1997 Ken felt compelled to sell up to British American Tobacco. After one final season, the Tyrrell name vanished from the grid. While its new owners used the entry, the new BAR squad was an entirely different entity, based in Brackley, Northamptonshire.

BAR was eventually sold to Honda, and when the Japanese manufacturer quit F1 ahead of the 2009 season (see p121), it became Brawn GP – which was promptly snapped up by Mercedes-AMG to become today's multi-title-winning outfit.

It's unrecognisable from anything that Ken would have knocked up in his shed, but there is still a link, because Mercedes-Benz Grand Prix Limited is registered in the UK by Companies House with the company number 00787446. And through multiple changes of ownership, that's the same company incorporated on 9 January 1964 by one Robert Kenneth Tyrrell.

"In France it's the ladybird and in Malta it's the upside-down bathtub"

The Volkswagen Beetle wasn't originally called the Beetle *FACT*

The original people's car, the Volkswagen Beetle, is an incredible success story. It was launched in 1938 yet the last example wasn't made until 2003 – a 65-year run that is the record for a single generation of automobile. Needless to say, the total of 21.5 million sold is also a record.

There is a bit of a catch, though: the first time you could actually walk into a dealership and buy a car called the Beetle was 1968. It was initially developed as the Porsche Type 60 and then the KdF-Wagen, before it became the Volkswagen Type 1. The name Käfer – German for beetle – quickly became a common colloquial term for it, but it wasn't until 1968 that it was officially adopted by Volkswagen.

Notably, the Beetle goes by various names – some official, some not – in different parts of the world. In France it's the Coccinelle (ladybird), in Indonesia it's the Kodok (frog) and in Malta it's the Banju Maqlub (upside-down bathtub).

The car's original designation leads us to another Volkswagen naming oddity. Wolfsburg's second product was the Type 2, now known as the Transporter. The first three generations all carried the Type 2 designation but have now been retconned into the T1, T2 and T3. Now known as the Multivan, it's in its seventh (T7) generation.

Carlos Ghosn escaped Japan in a cello case *FICTION*

It wasn't a cello case; it was a generic music equipment box generally used for storing guitars. Apart from that minor detail, though, the improbable tale of ex-Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn's escape from house arrest in Japan in 2019 is almost entirely true, and too good not to relive.

A reminder: Ghosn was the all-powerful head of both Renault and Nissan until he was dramatically arrested in Japan in 2018, on suspicion of misusing company funds. Ghosn denied the charges, instead alleging a coup to oust him before he could further tighten the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi Alliance. But with Japan's corporate conviction rate being above 99%, he decided his best chance of freedom was escape.

His audacious plan involved recruiting a former US special forces officer to smuggle him out of the country. Mike Taylor and his son Peter would enter Japan, pretending to be musicians (specifically violinists, despite not having a violin in sight), with a specially engineered music box featuring air vents for 65-year-old Ghosn to hide in.

On 29 December, Ghosn went to a hotel, where he was allowed to go for lunch, but instead sneaked upstairs to meet Taylor. With him wearing a surgical mask (common in Japan even before Covid), they caught a bullet train to Osaka, where Ghosn hid in the box until it was wheeled – unchecked – onto a private plane. As part of the disguise, Taylor rested a guitar on top of the box while going through customs, but there wasn't a cello in sight.

"The 30 minutes waiting in the box on the plane, waiting for it to take off, was probably the longest wait I've ever experienced in my life," Ghosn would later tell the BBC.

He remains in Lebanon, which doesn't have an extradition agreement with Japan. The US does, though, so the Taylors were arrested and sent to Tokyo, where they were sentenced to two years and 20 months in prison respectively.

GETTY IMAGES

GREATEST HITS

Here at Autocar, arguments rage over which is the best car from each manufacturer's back catalogue. **FELIX PAGE** decides to settle things

Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio

The office bickering began with the first manufacturer on the list, but it was inevitable: how could anyone possibly agree on a 'best' Alfa? 33 Stradale, 75, SZ, GTA, 156, 147, 8C… There was no chance of us even agreeing a top five, surely.

But while the debate rumbled on, Alfa coincidentally announced it was keeping the Giulia Quadrifoglio on sale for another year, and we were all so happy about it that we realised it was the obvious answer.

Kris Culmer was among the loudest supporters: "They designed the most handsome car of the 2010s, spent a mad amount on its chassis and gave it a stonking V6 of Ferrari parentage. When not broken, the Quadrifoglio is amazing."

A reassuringly traditional and endlessly appealing Alfa that still stuns even in its old age – and one we now have extra time to enjoy.

RUNNER-UP

8C Competizione

The 8C isn't just any old V8 sports car: this is a snarling piece of automotive art that wouldn't look out of place in the Uffizi Gallery. **SP**

Aston Martin V8 Vantage

A good old fashioned underdog victory here, as the 'baby' Aston snarls ahead of full-blooded bedroom poster cars like the DB9, DB5 and Valkyrie to emerge as Gaydon's greatest.

Charlie Martin said Britain's answer to the Porsche 911 "is what brought Aston back to the fold as a maker of proper 21st-century sports cars", adding: "It's powered by what is probably the angriest-sounding V8 ever built."

Matt Prior seemed a bit surprised at his own choice – "I'd rather have a DB9" – but conceded he had fond memories of racing one in the 24 Hours of Silverstone. "Great car. Best weekend ever."

RUNNER-UP

DB9

Henrik Fisker's timeless and handsome design, a smooth V12 and an all-round superb GT makes this my modern-day Aston highlight. **RB**

Audi Quattro

Michèle Mouton once acknowledged that Audi's original four-wheel-drive sports coupé had a powerful aura: "If I have some emotion, of course it's the noise of the Quattro. Nobody can forget the noise." That from the woman who famously "didn't feel at all" when preparing to tackle a WRC stage. How's that for proof of this Group B legend's unfaltering legacy?

Resident rally fanatic James Attwood certainly 'didn't feel' there was much more to say about the warbling wonder: "Just type 'Audi Quattro Group B' into YouTube and you'll see."

Jack Harrison said the Quattro is one of those rare cars that "is not only a style icon but also a mechanical milestone". Seriously quick, too, even by modern standards.

RUNNER-UP

R8

For years the Porsche 911 had been the default German sports car. Audi threw everything at knocking it off the top spot, and the quietly brilliant R8 was the result. **AW**

BMW 3 Series

Has there ever been a bad one? There are variants that don't suit specific needs, sure (you wouldn't catch an Uber driver in an M3 Touring CS and a humble 316i wouldn't be much cop at Cadwell Park), but through each of its seven generations, Munich's mid-size executive car has majored on mass appeal with a broad selection of brilliant incarnations that have won it legendary status in every corner of the car world.

At least that's what Mark Tisshaw thinks: "It feels such a reference for the wider market, even today. Such bandwidth in the range, too."

Jack Warrick called the 3 Series simply "one of the best all-rounders on sale", with a consistent excellence that is "always unmatched".

No pressure on the imminent Mk8, then.

RUNNER-UP

M5

If something is as fast or as engaging as an M5, then you know it's worth looking at, and staying relevant for 40 years across seven generations is well worth celebrating. **JH**

Citroën DS

The most recent DS we drove was an attractive but unadventurous high-riding hatchback that you would be hard pressed to mark out as a pioneer in any respect.

The first DS we ever drove, by way of contrast, was a futuristic tech-fest of a machine like no car that had gone before. It changed the face of luxury motoring forever and these days enjoys true legend status.

This hydropneumatically suspended oddball is that rare thing, according to Richard Lane: "It's an icon of both style and technology. All the derivatives have deep appeal, too, right from the lowliest home-market runabout to a luxe-spec 23 Pallas with reams of leather."

RUNNER-UP

C6

Citroën's comfort-first outlook produced a really rare and appealing big executive option in 2005 and, unlike so many rival options, it didn't have a sporting bone in its body – and it didn't need to. **MS**

RUNNER-UP

F40

Seriously? Is the 458, great car though it is, really better than the F40? I know serial owners and drivers of supercars who think that when it comes to excitement, the F40 is in the top one. **MP**

Ferrari 458 Italia

It's surprising to not have the F40, Enzo, 250 GTO or LaFerrari here, but of all the cars in this feature, the 458's victory-by-vote was among the most resounding.

Why? "It's the best mid-engined 'junior' Ferrari there has ever been," according to Matt Saunders. "It's young enough to have good ergonomics and cabin quality, a modern active diff and sensational handling but old enough to serve them as side dishes to a wonderful, high-revving atmo V8. Deified for good reasons."

No wonder, really, that values for 458s hold so strong even now (£175k for a late minter): its shrieking V8 – "gloriously unmuffled by turbochargers", noted Charlie Martin – and uncorrupted dynamics lend it an authenticity and viscerality that have yet to be surpassed.

Fiat 500

The VW Beetle has had it licked for longevity, the Mini offered a more spirited drive and the Citroën 2CV was more technically impressive, but no 'people's car' has quite so successfully transcended the boundaries of mere mass mobility as the Fiat 500 to become a fashion icon in its own right.

Bought and beloved even by those who could have had something 20 times the price, this tiny Turinese is one of those rare crowd-pleasers whose admirers unquestionably outweigh its detractors. "The fact that millennials and zoomers still crave owning an original 500, nearly 60 years after it was launched, tells you everything," said Richard Lane.

Illya Verpraet added: "It also put Italy on the road, practically built a company for decades and formed the basis for the design of Fiat's whole 2010s model line-up."

How's that for a dolce vita well lived?

RUNNER-UP

Panda

Simple, bombproof and with the heart and soul of a mountain goat. Few classic superminis drum up as much charm as Fiat's original Panda. **SP**

RUNNER-UP

Fiesta

Later iterations gave millions of Brits access to a genuinely excellent driving experience. Many will realise what has been lost only when they come to replace theirs. **KC**

Ford Focus

Maybe winner and runner-up could have been swapped here, had the order of their premature (as many feel them to be) demises been reversed, but as it is, it's the larger car we've said goodbye to most recently, and perhaps thus its legacy is felt more keenly.

Not that the Focus is any less deserving of reverence than the Fiesta, having kept the lights on at Ford of Europe for three decades and delighted millions with an unusual blend of engagement, frugality and utility.

"It proves that driver appeal can be placed at the centre of a product and it can still be a smash-hit volume seller and mass-market success," said Mark Tisshaw.

Rachel Burgess summarised: "It's a practical, unassuming family car, and one that was thoroughly chuckable around a corner – win-win."

Honda NSX

"The NSX is what happens when a mass-market car firm decides to make a high-tech supercar. Come on: you don't see Ferrari trying to make a Jazz rival, do you?" James Attwood there, qualifying his nomination for a 1990s performance hero that doesn't quite carry the same cachet these days as its European counterparts but which was no less technically impressive.

Far from it. In fact, Matt Saunders hailed the NSX for bringing "prosaic Honda ownership qualities to the super-sports car market and changing it forever". "But," he added, "it's just as wonderful for its brilliant hydraulic steering, enticing tactile shift quality and sweet-revving naturally aspirated V6. Honda should dare to dream more often."

RUNNER-UP

Civic

One of those rare family cars that appeals to both head and heart – albeit perhaps more the latter in ever-brilliant Type R form. **WR**

Jaguar XJ

The E-Type is the most beautiful, the D-Type is a racing legend, the XJ220 was era-defining and the I-Pace was briefly one of the most advanced and striking EVs. But there could only be one victor, as Matt Prior said: "Jaguar has made many cars that have done many things, but few car makers can be defined by one model. The XJ is Jaguar."

Illya Verpraet agreed but was rather more specific: "The original Series 1 XJ6 was so beautiful that Jaguar then struggled to make anything that didn't look like it. It was the luxury limo that was cheaper than and out-handled and out-rode sports saloons of the day."

RUNNER-UP

Mk2

The Mk2 was so good, so handsome, so fast and so dynamically adept that every Jag saloon for the next 50 years would try to ape it. **AW**

Lamborghini Gallardo

'Deafening silence', 'organised chaos', 'open secret' – all good examples of oxymorons. Here's another: 'baby Lambo'. It has been used historically to describe lower-order entrants to Sant'Agata's ranks, but it stopped making sense in 2003, when the Gallardo arrived with a howling V10, spaceship styling, at least 500bhp and specs to set alarms ringing in Maranello.

"It's not the best-looking, but to me it is the definitive Lamborghini," said Will Rimell, highlighting the earliest manual cars as a particular sweet spot.

Murray Scullion picked the Gallardo because it turned Lambo from "perennially skint to a supercar heavyweight" and because it was "achingly pretty and had a gated manual".

Let's all just ignore the Audi A4 switchgear.

RUNNER-UP

Countach

There's a scene in Miami Vice in which a baddie tries to escape Crockett in a cocaine-white, fully winged-and-skirted Countach, and nothing could be more gloriously '80s. It lives in my head rent-free. **KC**

Lancia Stratos

It's just mad, isn't it? Forget, if you can, that it has a waspish Ferrari V6 buried in that stunning rear end; disregard the technical genius concealed within its drop-dead silhouette; and park the fact that it won the WRC three times on the trot. Just look at it. There you go: that's the main reason why the Stratos is our favourite Lancia.

"I'll never forget the sight and sound of a Stratos tearing up the gravel at Sweet Lamb on a bitter winter's night, doing as it was designed to do," said Jack Harrison.

For Charlie Martin, the Stratos completely "redefined what 'homologation special' meant" and it has a legacy that far transcends mere motorsport prowess.

RUNNER-UP

037

Never driven one, never sat in one and by all accounts it's an incredibly dangerous car. But if you think rally cars are best when rear-driven, and I do, this is the pinnacle. **MP**

Land Rover Range Rover

"When a car becomes a brand, it has done something right," said Mark Tisshaw, who sees the carving out of Range Rover into what is in effect a marque in its own right as a monument to the luxury 4x4's renown and all-round excellence. Every generation, he added, has been "peerless on and off road".

The current generation is so vastly capable and refined, in fact – "blending effortless refinement with genuine all-terrain capability", said Sam Phillips – that it's not just one of the best SUVs in the world but one of the best cars full stop.

RANGE ROVER
THE GREAT DIVIDE EXPEDITION
MICHELIN

RUNNER-UP

Series Land Rover

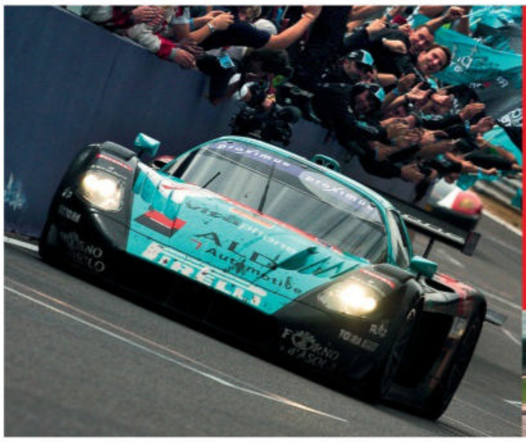
As appealing to the farmer as it was to the adventurer and the landed gentry. So outstandingly fit for purpose that in 1990 it morphed into the Defender and remained on sale for many more decades. **IV**

RUNNER-UP
Carlton
In light of how over-powered and wildly complex 'super-saloons' have become today, this seminal example of the breed feels refreshingly simple and fuss-free. **FP**

Lotus Elise

It says it all that the Elise is still viewed by so many as a definitive dynamic benchmark – the default lightweight sports car, even – three decades after its arrival. The no-frills featherweight did no less than completely upend the sports car market, and its legacy lives on through the massive influence its innovative design and engineering still has on car development today.

Matt Saunders hailed the Elise for showing that “Hethel could make a modern, technically innovative product” but, importantly, doing so “without sacrificing a jot on old-school, analogue sporting feel or on Chapman’s core values of lightness and simplicity”. It’s a true icon of British automotive excellence.



RUNNER-UP
Quattroporte
A few blips aside, the Quattroporte has been about the most consistently brilliant Maserati. I have a love for every generation – even the disastrous Mk2. **AW**

Maserati MC12

From early Formula 1 conquerors to achingly beautiful 1960s GTs and brutal V8 super-saloons, this isn’t a brand short on bedroom poster material. But it’s the wildest Maserati of all that gets our vote: the V12-wielding, Le Mans-honed MC12, which, said Charlie Martin, “utterly ruined sports car racing through sheer domination – and looked gorgeous while doing it”.

“The greatest Maserati of all time should probably hail from the dim and distant, but how do you ignore the MC12?” asked Richard Lane. “Ferrari Enzo-derived mechanicals with a civilised cabin in stunning, GT1-inspired drag. Can you imagine if Maserati did similar today? They could charge £10 million for it.”

Mazda MX-5

You knew it was coming. There was a smattering of nominations for the slightly esoteric RX-7, but the MX-5’s victory here was nothing short of a landslide.

There’s a clever (if tired) US backronym that sums up the universal applicability of Mazda’s roadster: ‘Miata Is Always The Answer’. Its name may be different here, but the notion holds true: it isn’t just one of the best-handling sports cars around, it’s also one of the most affordable, efficient, well packaged, refined, well built and charming. And that has been pretty much true of every iteration.

“It’s not easy to get something as pure as a two-seater roadster so right. That Mazda has delivered over multiple generations is remarkable,” said James Attwood.

Kris Culmer credited the MX-5 as having “single-handedly preserved the traditional roadster – and latterly also the affordable enthusiast’s car”, adding: “It’s so much fun, and we all owe it a huge debt of gratitude.”

RUNNER-UP
RX-7
Mazda has yet to build anything more attractive. It was my childhood poster car and it has become a cult classic, largely because of how infinitely customisable it was. **WR**

RUNNER-UP
S-Class
It has played second fiddle to EVs and SUVs in recent years, but for decades this was a fusion of the very best of everything that Stuttgart could produce – and it felt like it. **MS**

Mercedes-Benz W123

German taxi drivers’ affinity for the W123 is a strong enough indication of reliability and rugged dependability, but that this granite-hewn executive express could spend years plying the autobahns and then go on to a second life tramping around North Africa for a few more decades makes the W123 well worthy of its ‘unkillable’ reputation.

It’s also just endlessly cool and supremely comfortable – which is why you still see minters trundling around rather more hospitable environs, such as Kensington or Tunbridge Wells. Of the hundreds of wildly varied legends in Merc’s back catalogue, it was the W123 that “arguably built the brand’s worldwide reputation”, according to Alex Wolstenholme. “They will last forever,” he added. Yes, but only if you stop them getting too wet.

RUNNER-UP
MGB
Simple construction, rear-drive layout, torquey 1.8-litre engine and more than 500,000 sold. This was Britain’s MX-5 moment – just 27 years before the Mazda. **MSc**

MG ZT-T 260

“The joy of dying brands” for Illya Verpraet “is they sometimes become delirious. Take the pipe-and-slippers, front-drive Rover 75 and re-engineer it to fit a longitudinal 4.6 V8 driving the rear wheels…”

His simplistic summary of the ZT-T 260’s conception goes some way to explaining why we love it: it was just so ridiculously, wackily out of character – and a brilliantly extroverted swansong for a much-loved marque in its death throes. Matt Saunders agreed, saying: “The 75 already had a fantastic chassis – although, for so long, any praise for it had to be qualified with terms like ‘front-wheel drive’ and ‘K-series’. But when MG hit on the idea of a rear-drive version with a Mustang V8, no such qualifications were needed. Mad, needy and a little bit wonderful.”

Mini Mini

We don't use the phrase 'Concorde moment' lightly, but if ever there was a car equivalent, the original Mini – with the sort of genius packaging, engaging drivability and inherent accessibility that manufacturers still strive to replicate several decades after it died – was probably it.

Mark Tisshaw called it "a true icon", with engineering that "still feels impossible". Car makers today can't build anything like it. It weighed just 600kg, sat four (sort of) comfortably and safely (ish), sipped fuel and drove with a zip and verve that made it the darling of the grassroots motorsport scene.

Matt Prior said it was basically the default choice for our favourite Mini ever, because "it was the only Mini for so long that only it could be the best". Every new Mini since has tried, at least in part, to retain some of the original's character.

RUNNER-UP
Cooper S
Two words: supercharger whine. That noise alone from something so small makes it a legend. That it's one of the sweetest-handling hatches ever made is a bonus. **JH**

Nissan SKYLINE GT-R (R34)

A halo car for a generation of car enthusiasts and far more accessible than most to fans of all ages, courtesy of its role in the Gran Turismo racing game series. Here was an unfathomably capable V6 sports car that was unlike anything that had come before it and which you could drive from the comfort of your sofa at the age of 10.

Not that it was so tameable in the real world, mind, cautioned Richard Lane: "It's not the 'PlayStation on wheels' it's made out to be but rather emblematic of Nissan when the link from race track to road was incredibly strong. That makes it a properly rewarding driver's car."

Kris Culmer agreed that the R34 "was the peak of cool for petrolheads growing up in the early 2000s" but reckoned that you had to have one in blue with gold wheels for the full experience. He's not fussy, though, if you're offering a go.

RUNNER-UP
350Z
There was an emphatic quality to the design of the 350Z that made it much more appealing than the 370Z that replaced it. It proved that a workaday brand could make a special car. **MS**

Peugeot 205

One of those cars that was so toweringly excellent in range-topping form that you could easily forget the cooking versions were just as brilliant.

Everyone raves about the GTi, along with the lesser-known XS and Rallye variants, but there's a lot to be said for a humble 205 1.4 GR or even a lowly 1.1 Junior. Heck, even the non-turbocharged diesel GLD is a fine way of covering ground – so long as you're not late for an important appointment.

Jack Warrick credited the 205 as being the model "that changed Peugeot's fortunes and public perception" and added that its angular, oh-so-'80s silhouette has "truly stood the test of time".

Sam Phillips agreed that the 205 was "decent in all its forms", but he couldn't resist marking out the GTi as "one of the best driver's cars of all time". No small praise, that, for a 40-year-old supermini.

RUNNER-UP
106
When small cars were designed to appeal to the 'yoof', one appealed more than the rest. Hard to be bettered as a city car and surely now won't be as a micro-GTi hot hatch. **MT**

Porsche 911

The Boxster is the cheapest, the Cayenne the most usable, the 356 the prettiest and the 918 the most technically impressive. But the most 'Porsche' of all the Porsches? There could only be one.

"It's not just the best Porsche, it's the Porsche that makes Porsche Porsche," said James Attwood of the 911 (forgetting that his surname dictates he should choose the 917K). "And it's so famous you don't even need to say 'Porsche' for people to know what a 911 is."

These days, there are a dizzying number of variants from which to choose, ranging from entry-level Carrera up through 4S, T, GTS, Turbo, Turbo S, S/T, GT3 and GT3 RS – and that's to name but a few. And then certain versions can be chosen as a coupé, a cabriolet or a targa... It can all get a bit confusing if you're not fully invested. But the short of it is that all of them are excellent and supremely well rounded in their own ways.

RUNNER-UP
959
Of all the mad things to know about Porsche's first proper 'supercar', the maddest is that it was conceived as a Group B rally car. A monumentally impressive piece of engineering. **FP**

Renault Clio

Everyone has had one or at least been in one – but the Renault Clio's popular appeal and historic utilitarianism never came at the expense of its desirability. While some alternatives evolved into little more than drab, A-to-B appliances, Dieppe's take on the supermini always maintained a certain 'je ne sais quoi' over the decades, and even at its most humdrum it remains a thoroughly likeable little car. Just ask Nicole.

Or ask Matt Saunders, who said it was perhaps "the first of the modern 'designer' superminis, proving that a dash of style and verve could go a very long way on a little car".

It's a notion into which the designers of the extroverted latest-generation car have really leaned, for better or worse.

RUNNER-UP
Mégane RS
For an all too brief time, Renaultsport occupied a wonderful place in motordom, making incredibly good affordable driver's cars. The best Mégane RS was the ultimate. **MP**

Skoda Superb

Nominative determinism at its very best here. Has there been any other car so aptly badged?

At the heart of the Superb's acclaim is that it's almost impossible to not recommend – to almost anyone. Yes, it's perfect for motorway-plying families and itinerant execs, but you needn't fit either category to be won over by its blend of no-nonsense ergonomics, supreme refinement and – in most forms – remarkable frugality.

Will Rimell is head over heels: "It's the best mile-muncher there is: comfortable, economical and spacious, with heaps of buttons that do what you think they should. I'm sure there are people who say this isn't the best all-rounder on sale. I'm also sure they are wrong."

RUNNER-UP

Octavia

Whatever you want it to be: million-mile minicab, practical family hauler, Rogan Josh-hot hatch – sometimes all at once. Bonus points for affordability. **CM**

Toyota GT86

Most of us have a 'top 10 favourite cars' in mind, shuffling things in and out day by day and rarely giving the same answer twice – but the tail-happy GT86 is one of those unfathomably rare cars that seems to have earned itself a permanent place on everyone's leaderboard.

Illya Verpraet said: "An image of boringness is notoriously hard to shake off, but Toyota managed it with the GT86. Here was the real-world usable sports car of our dreams, with the right footprint, right amount of power and right amount of grip." He lamented only that its improved GR86 successor was available in such limited numbers.

Saunders touched on a slightly awkward truth: "It was built in a Subaru factory and was powered by a low-lying Subaru flat four, which gave it key dynamic advantages." Nonetheless, he added: "It's hard to think of a car that altered perceptions of its maker quite so powerfully."

RUNNER-UP

Land Cruiser

It's more than a car; in some parts of the world it's a lifeline. Quite luxurious now but still capable of getting you to some truly inhospitable places, then back out again. **RL**

Vauxhall Corsa

As one of the less 'enthusiast-oriented' marques on this list, Vauxhall doesn't have a bulging portfolio of legendary past models to draw from when it comes to choosing a top hit. But it is perhaps the brand to which most people have been directly exposed, and there is no model more representative of its mammoth cultural impact than the Corsa.

I learned to drive in one, and nearly all my mates had one when we were in sixth form. It has always felt a little staid next to Ford's Fiesta, but I admire its understated handsomeness and universal appeal. So does James Attwood: "The Corsa hasn't always been a great car, but it always delivered on its supermini brief. It's a mass-market crowd-pleaser in the best way."

Plus, remember when Vauxhall went a bit mad with the absolutely wild VXR Nurbürgring edition? It's always the quiet ones... "Come on!" etc.

RUNNER-UP

Monaro VXR

A Nascar soundtrack paired with just-subtle-enough looks – and a simply awesome reminder that car manufacturers are at their best when they do things for the fun of it. **JH**

Volkswagen Golf

What more can be said about the VW Golf? It's about as close to the distilled essence of 'car' as you can get. "Excellent at everything yet always entirely modest," as Kris Culmer put it.

Practical in all of its forms, well built and attractive in (almost) every generation, generally affordable and sensibly packaged: half a century on from its conception, the Golf remains the reference point for how to make an everyday family car.

"When someone doesn't know what car to choose, you tell them to buy a Golf in a form that suits them," said Mark Tisshaw. That nails it.

RUNNER-UP

Beetle

Awful to drive, prone to rust and built for far too long, it's a case study in how far cars have come. But 21 million buyers can't be wrong. **FP**

Volvo 850

Was Huey Lewis right? Can it really be hip to be square? You try looking at the 850 and arguing otherwise. This "pinnacle of brilliantly boxy Volvo design", said James Attwood, is one of the, er, hippest cars ever made. There was a wheel-cocking BTCC version, too, which "made it incredibly cool".

It's a forgotten seminal sports estate as well, in slightly silly R form – with 247bhp giving a 0-62mph sprint time of 6.7sec, which sounds pretty sprightly even today.

Plus it was built like a tank, had a colossal boot and, as Jack 'Safety First' Warrick excitedly reminded us, "was the first mass-production car with side airbags". And if that doesn't make you want one...

RUNNER-UP

240

Long emblematic of Volvo, the brick weathered storms of lacklustre reviews for tepid dynamics and scorn for being boring. But it is now an icon of simple Swedish design and build quality and has cult status. **IV**

Future proof

The future is an uncertain place without the annual Autocar Almanac. **JAMES ATTWOOD** guarantees all this will happen

JANUARY

◆ Eager not to do any real work, sorry, to liven up the annual Autocar Almanac, I fire up ChatGPT and ask it to come up with some satirical events that could possibly maybe happen in 2026. My AI colleague analyses everything Elon Musk did in 2025 for source material, before writing “think you can parody that? Good luck” and exploding.

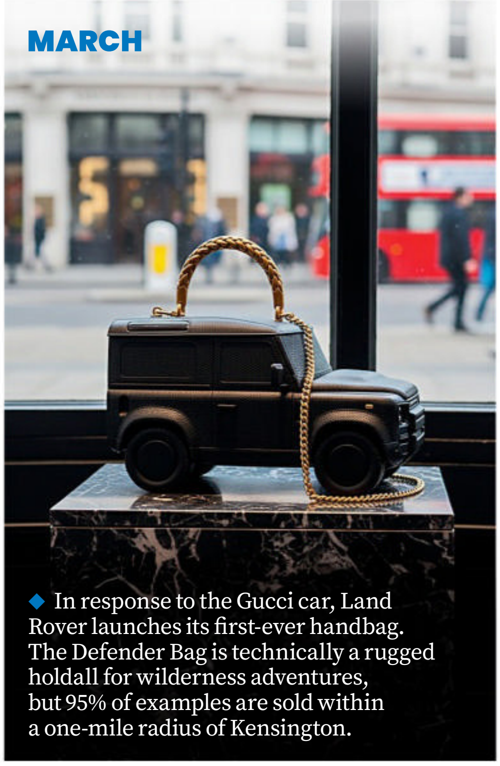
◆ There is panic in the Jaguar design office when it’s realised the blueprints for the Type 00 concept were erased in last year’s cyber attack. Gerry McGovern’s hologram rallies the troops, insisting: “We can design something even better and make another advert that will be just as universally loved.”

FEBRUARY

◆ Luca de Meo, new boss of the Kering fashion group, unveils plans to turn around the company by diversifying into new areas with key brands. “My strategy draws on my extensive experience,” says the former Renault boss before unveiling the first-ever Gucci car. It’s an instant hit, despite an ambitious premium price tag. The ride and handling are nothing special, but rivals are impressed with its storage capacity.

◆ Audi starts a joint venture with ChatGPT maker OpenAI to develop a new line of super-smart vehicles. There are early teething troubles with the new OpenAIdi because not even the world’s smartest computer system can make any sense of the firm’s model naming strategy.

MARCH



◆ In response to the Gucci car, Land Rover launches its first-ever handbag. The Defender Bag is technically a rugged holdall for wilderness adventures, but 95% of examples are sold within a one-mile radius of Kensington.

◆ An administrative error at motorsport’s governing body, the FIA, means that instead of the planned 2026 regulations, Formula 1 accidentally adopts Group B rules for the coming season. New entrant Audi quickly ditches its planned F1 car and dusts off a Quattro S1 from storage. Michèle Mouton dominates the season-opening Australian Grand Prix.

APRIL

◆ Encouraged by the success of its OpenAI tie-up, Audi looks for more non-automotive partners and seals a deal with a budget supermarket chain. The Aldi-Audi deal results in a cheap car with a surprisingly premium interior and whose most notable feature is an extended centre console that can accommodate an air fryer, some garden shears, power tools, an inflatable kayak, garden gnomes and more. Much more.

MAY

◆ Eager to shore up its cybersecurity following last year’s devastating attack, JLR borrows a new piece of anti-malware from fellow hack victims Marks & Spencer. Unfortunately, M&S execs hand over the wrong floppy disk, and the Colin the Caterpillar cake recipe overwrites details of the newly recreated Jaguar concept.

◆ Having struggled early in the F1 season after the new rules forced it to run an old Group 4 308 GTB, Ferrari secures a partnership with Lancia to field a pair of Delta S4s. The new car beats Audi to score a shock victory in the Miami GP, although Lewis Hamilton is upstaged by new team-mate Markku Alén.

JUNE

◆ Jaguar previews its radical reinvention as an upmarket, er, cake brand with a new concept. The Type C00lin is a sleek chocolate log adorned with cutesy lepidoptera larva styling. “It’s not at all a rebadged Colin the Caterpillar,” insists a JLR official with chocolate round his mouth.

◆ Having played a key role in its development, Williams F1 makes a mid-season switch to the MG Metro 6R4 due to F1’s rally-based rules. The new machine is fast, but poor reliability blunts its challenge.

JULY

◆ Toyota unveils a new version of its popular city car featuring what it claims is the most advanced computing system fitted to a car. Called the Toyota AI-go, it can average 75mpg while doing teenagers' homework and depriving them of the ability to think or reason for themselves.

◆ Luca de Meo reveals how he'll breathe new life into Alexander McQueen, another of Kering's brands, by launching a new performance car. The Alexander Lightning McQueen proves a big hit in America and even enjoys sporting success with victory in the prestigious Piston Cup.

AUGUST

◆ In a surprise move, Aldi-Audi reveals a sleek new kids' cake. The Concept Cuthbert receives a hugely positive reaction, although JLR and M&S immediately launch legal action over its design.

◆ Peugeot announces it will enter F1. Plans to partner McLaren are ruled out because everyone agrees the 1994 McLaren-Peugeot MP4/9 is best forgotten, so instead the firm enters a 205 T16. Ari Vatanen and Timo Salonen dominate the remainder of the F1 season.

SEPTEMBER

◆ Encouraged by the success of other car maker-supermarket partnerships, BMW firms up a partnership with Waitrose that greatly excites Middle England. The two companies preview their tie-up with a new insect-based cake. The Vision Cyril stands out for the unusual kidney grille adorning the cutesy caterpillar face. JLR-M&S's lawyers type up a cease-and-desist letter.

◆ Google and BMW Group announce a bold plan to use AI to develop a new city car together. The new Google GeMini offers go-kart handling and can also write your emails for you, should you be the sort of person too lazy to, you know, actually write an email.

OCTOBER

◆ Luca de Meo poaches Renault's design chief to join the Kering fashion empire by giving him full control of one of the brands. The newly renamed Yves Saint Laurent van den Acker quickly announces it will expand into the car world with a new supermini that looks far better than the new Clio.

NOVEMBER

◆ Citroën reveals plans to enter F1 with its BX4TC Group B car. Thankfully for all involved, F1 bosses finally manage to reset their server and are able to implement the sport's actual 2026 rules package, sparing everyone from having to see that monstrosity in action again.

◆ VW secures an agreement with Sainsbury's to enter the lucrative multi-legged insect cake market. The ID Wiggles is a hit, but JLR's lawyers send a cease-and-desist letter, which ends with: "Seriously, why don't you get the bit about using a name beginning with C for a caterpillar cake?"

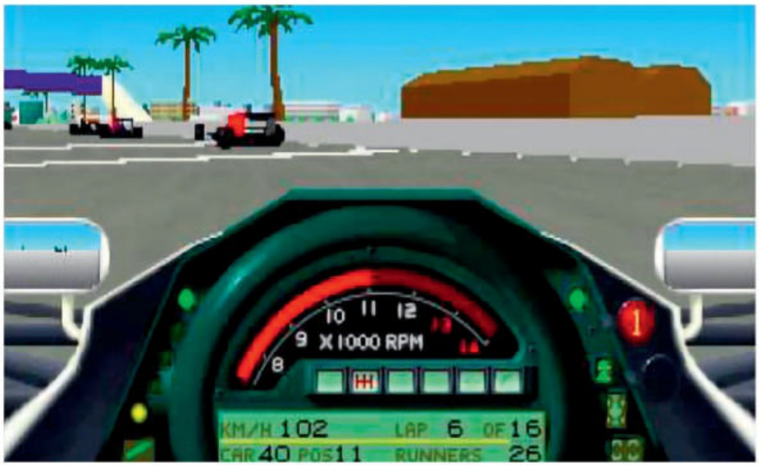
DECEMBER

◆ Eager to know how accurate this almanac is, the raw copy is fed into Skynet's AI model, which is asked to predict how much might come true. Unfortunately, the algorithm takes offence at our gentle mocking of AI, so it raises an army of robots with Austrian accents and proceeds to subjugate humanity.

AUTOCAR
BEST OF 2025

GAME LOVER

When the Autocar team aren't on the road, we're often in front of a screen pretending to be. Here are some of our favourite driving games



MICROPROSE FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

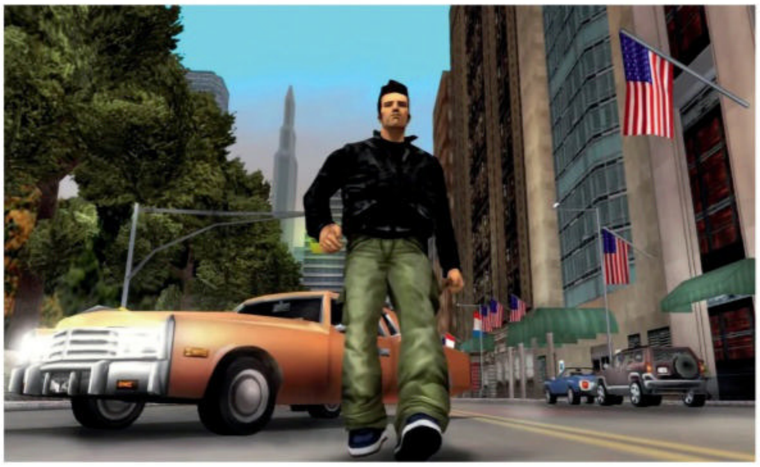
1991, Commodore Amiga

I stand by a claim that I made in a 'Why I love…' article earlier this year that Super Mario Kart is the greatest racing game of all time. But if you're looking for realism, you can't beat Geoff Crammond's early 1990s masterpiece.

Okay, realism is a relative term (compare F1GP's blocky 3D graphics with today's photorealistic efforts), but Crammond's game was one of the first true F1 simulators, in which you could play a full season – practice sessions and all – and tiny set-up changes would profoundly affect your car's handling.

It even offered multiplayer action, although none of this online nonsense: play-by-mail allowed you to save games onto a floppy disk and post them to a friend. Glory days.

JAMES ATTWOOD



GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

2001, various systems

There are few video games that proved truly game-changing, but GTA3 was certainly one: a world where you could go anywhere and, infamously, do more or less anything you liked. Yes, even that…

The producers didn't (or couldn't) license any real vehicles, instead not-so-gently reimagining existing famous designs. Even today's driving games mostly lack the visceral thrill of real driving at speed, but some 25 years ago few things matched the joy of driving a stolen unmarked FBI sedan real fast through dense, chaotic city streets, pursued by endless cop cars, choppers and even tanks if you were really naughty.

Yes, it was more comic than real, but Lord it was fun.

TOM EVANS

GRAN TURISMO

1997, Sony PlayStation

I played this game as a very impressionable primary schoolchild, and it was life-changing. Here was a load of everyday cars that you could rag around a track, with realistic (for the time) physics and graphics.

I could never get over the choice of cars: there were about 140, and at the time that felt like 140,000. And best of all, the disk would simply sit there, safe inside my matt-grey PlayStation, waiting for me to play after double maths: there were none of those annoying online updates.

I'm still hit by a wave of nostalgia whenever I see a Mazda Demio.

MURRAY SCULLION

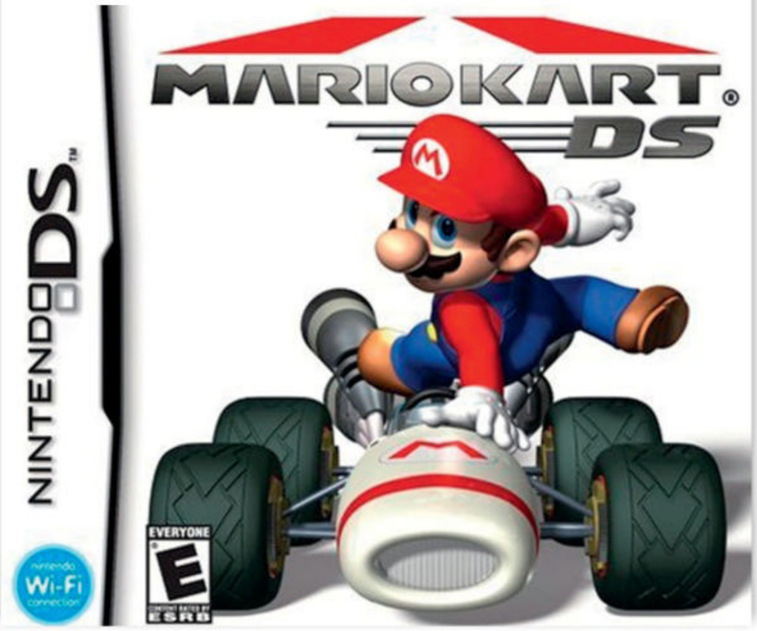
MARIO KART DS

2005, Nintendo DS

Mario Kart DS wasn't the best racing game to come from the Italian plumber's long line of banana-peel-filled adventures, but it was one of the most groundbreaking. It was the first to use Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection and therefore the first to allow you to race against other players from around the world. It was the first to revive circuits from previous games. And, most importantly, it supported the DS's Single-Pak multiplayer function, meaning friends who didn't own the game themselves could join in the fun.

I have fond memories of school trips, lunch breaks and end-of-year 'fun days' sat playing this handheld masterpiece with all of my friends. It helped that I was bloody good at 'snaking' too, which meant I won quite a lot…

JACK WARRICK



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

2004, various systems

This gift from Dad was what first made cars seem exciting to me. The premise is reckless street racing through a generic American city all night, weaving at insane speeds between civilian vehicles – which are spectacularly launched skyward in slow-mo when you inevitably get it wrong. But it's okay, because there is no police to worry about and the badass racer girl who guides you through 'the scene' always implores you to "only race in the game".

Which I did, a lot. I unwittingly learned about racing lines, realised that not all cars were boring boxes and discovered a lot of horizon-widening 'grown-up music'.

The characters' slang and the cars' modified appearances have since aged to cringeworthy effect, yo, but if ever I win bank on the lottery, I might just buy a green Nissan 350Z and paint a purple dragon down the side.

KRIS CULMER

DIRT RALLY 2.0

2019, various systems

Don't cut. For the love of all that is holy, when Phil Mills tells you not to cut, don't you bloody dare cut.

Dirt Rally 2.0 is less a game and more an existential experience in despair: you'll clip a rock and go flying off a cliff, ending your rally, more times than you'll score stage wins.

Yet it will get you hooked. Be it the gorgeous audiovisual presentation, the fantastic car and location lists or the impressive physics (simulating even the wear and tear of a stage's surfaces depending on where you are in the running order), you'll find hundreds of hours of enjoyment. And when it finally clicks, you'll get the full Colin McRae experience.

CHARLIE MARTIN

SNOWRUNNER
SEASON 1 SEARCH & RECOVER

SNOWRUNNER

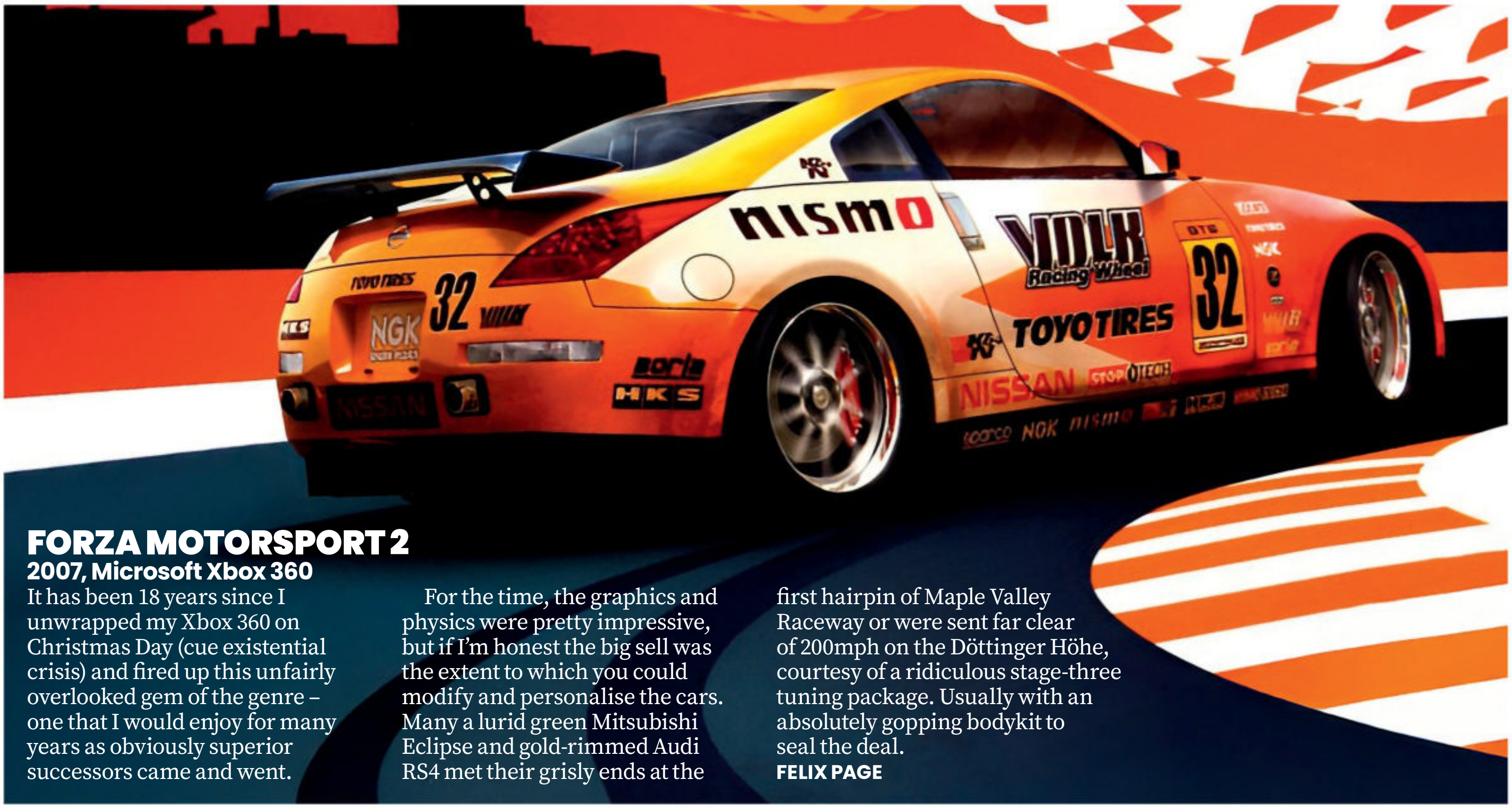
2020, various systems

On the face of it, Snowrunner seems almost relaxing: you use a variety of vehicles, ranging from a Land Rover Defender 90 to a 1980s Soviet missile carrier, to carry cargo along off-road trails. It's not.

You'll want to scout routes across whichever boggy hell you end up in before you start hauling loads – a process that will inevitably result in you getting stuck in a quagmire and needing to send a second scout vehicle to rescue it. Which you'll then either roll, run out of fuel in or also get stuck.

It's slow, steady and genuinely infuriating at times but rewarding to get right. I really ought to find a less stressful way to pass my spare time, like base jumping or competing at the Isle of Man TT.

JACK HARRISON



FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

2007, Microsoft Xbox 360

It has been 18 years since I unwrapped my Xbox 360 on Christmas Day (cue existential crisis) and fired up this unfairly overlooked gem of the genre – one that I would enjoy for many years as obviously superior successors came and went.

For the time, the graphics and physics were pretty impressive, but if I'm honest the big sell was the extent to which you could modify and personalise the cars. Many a lurid green Mitsubishi Eclipse and gold-rimmed Audi RS4 met their grisly ends at the first hairpin of Maple Valley Raceway or were sent far clear of 200mph on the Döttinger Höhe, courtesy of a ridiculous stage-three tuning package. Usually with an absolutely gopping bodykit to seal the deal.

FELIX PAGE

MARIO KART 8

2014, Nintendo Wii U

You might think that this is just another Mario Kart game, but actually it isn't quite like any of the others. Mario Kart 8 brings back the magic of all the previous games with its remastered maps from older consoles.

The best thing about it is that you can play virtually every version of the ultra-tricky Rainbow Road track out there in one game. And there was a download pack that added Coconut Mall, a fan favourite from the original Wii.

Playing this game transports me to the nostalgic worlds of older consoles like the GameCube with colourful, tight-turning circuits and retro soundtracks. In my opinion, nothing beats it.

SOPHIA GRACE

> ***“I was rubbish, so I just drove the wrong way and crashed into everyone”***

STATION
TRIPLE A TITLE
95%
PlayStation
Stunna!
“The most realistic racing game ever made”
PlayStation Power
93%
Bryn Williams www.f1picturenet.com
DESIGNED & PUBLISHED BY
Codemasters

TOCA 2: TOURING CARS

1998, Sony PlayStation

There’s a chain of second-hand entertainment shops called Cex (extraordinarily, the ‘C’ is pronounced ‘S’…) and, a couple of years ago, with an hour to kill in Banbury town centre, nostalgia took over and I bought an original PlayStation console from there. I’m not usually a fan of hanging onto stuff, but one period game from the PS1’s heyday stays in that box at the top of the wardrobe: Toca 2.

It was absolutely nails to try to keep the car on the track, let alone take any type of glory, but what fun I had trying it again. The game is so colourful and vivid, and fully licensed for the full nostalgia shot. I was rubbish, so did the obvious thing: drive the wrong way and just crash into everyone else.

MARK TISSHAW

GRAN TURISMO 5

2010, Sony PlayStation 3

No, it doesn’t have as many cars as GT4, and no, it’s not as nostalgic as some of the earlier Gran Turismo games, but it moved the game on when it came to the simulation and the graphics. Plus it has my favourite opening montage of the series, courtesy of My Chemical Romance.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

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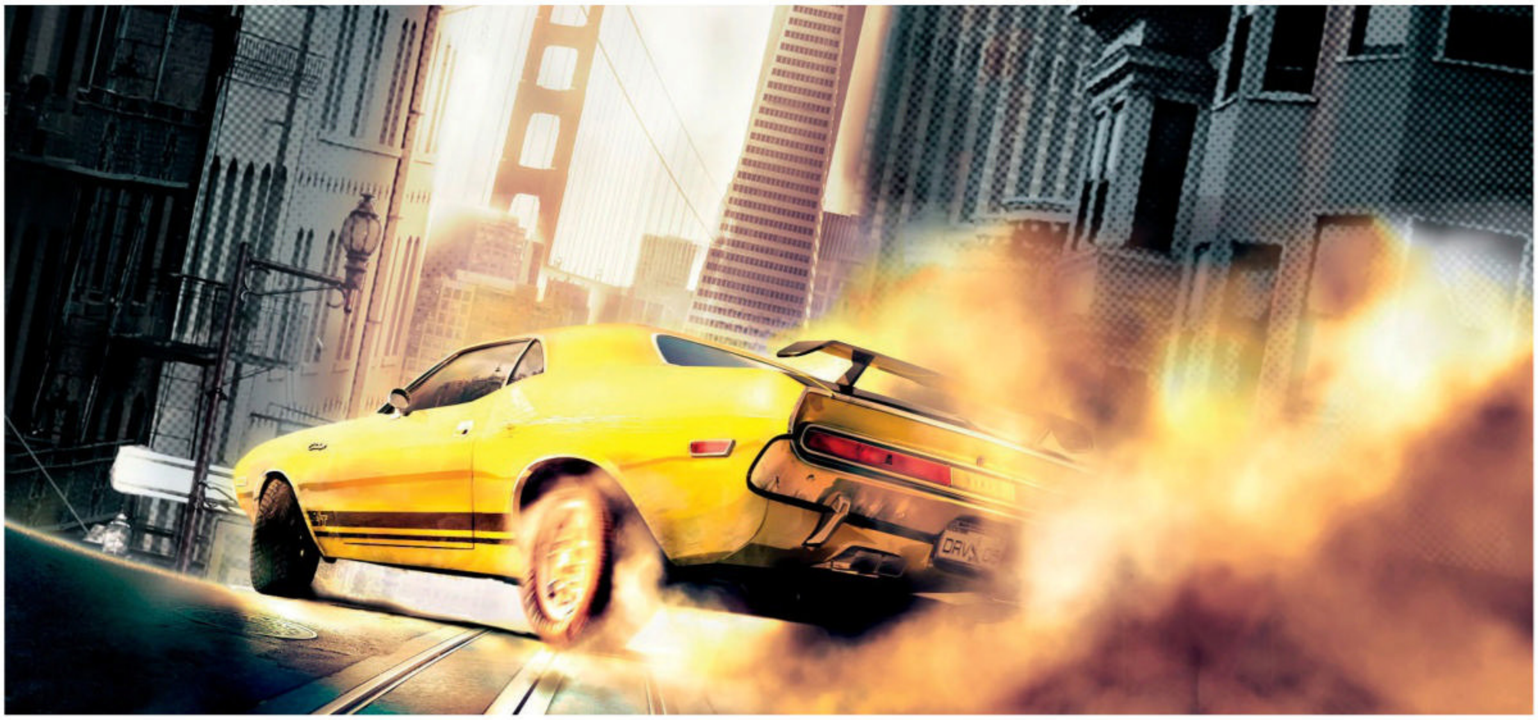


DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

2011, various systems

This is an unusual driving game, with a pretty abstract and bizarre storyline: after crashing his bright yellow 1970 Dodge Challenger R/T while chasing the game’s villain, police detective John Tanner gains the ability to travel out of body and possess anyone else driving around suburban San Francisco.

Yes, I know it sounds weird, but the game is as much about cars as it is about the plot, with a fascinating roster of vehicles at your disposal to explore the city, from supercars to classic muscle cars to trucks.

DANNY DAVIES

McLAREN ARTURA

At the beginning of my first full lap of Llandow Circuit behind the wheel of the Artura in the summer, I had what can at best be called a 'track limits violation', cutting the corner onto the grass at the first chicane. It felt awful and sounded loud from behind the wheel but looked far less dramatic on camera. And, thankfully, there wasn't a scratch on the car.

Hurting my pride but leaving my reputation intact, it served to show just how shockingly quick the Artura is and how effortlessly its performance is delivered. It can and will catch you off guard if you don't stay on top of it.

The Artura, heavily upgraded and improved around a year ago, is as memorable and exciting as any supercar should be to drive on road and track in terms of its raw performance, but its breadth of abilities beyond that is what makes it so remarkable. It is a car in which you can potter around town silently and innocuously in electric mode, with suspension compliance that could pass for a comfortable family hatchback's.

Such benign traits can lull you into a false sense of security. My Llandow shock was one example, and on wet country roads a day earlier it had spun its wheels even in fourth gear. I loved what that did to my heart rate, the white-knuckle side to its character only adding to its appeal and to the reward factor when you get it right.

MARK TISSHAW

Rent-free in

Autocar's testers have collectively evaluated hundreds of cars this

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

Earlier in the year, I umpired a twin test between the 12Cilindri and the Aston Martin Vanquish. Yes, it was a big day in the office – a 1600bhp day. Both GTs have their strengths and are actually much more of a complementary offering than their arch-nemesis billing suggests. If, for instance, I had to drive 500 miles right now, there's no question that I'd take the Brit. However, in raw dynamic terms, if the road ahead is even vaguely interesting, I'd take the Italian. Ride, handling, steering, brakes: it's no contest.

The 12Cilindri's manner isn't for everyone and, yes, there's a vestigial sharpness to the steering from the old and sometimes absurdly reactive F12 Berlinetta. But the difference now is that you can very quickly become at one with the machine – and that's just a fabulous place to be.

Take it as read that the fundamental balance of the thing is perfect. No, really: perfect. Next up is something people don't talk about often with this car, which is its vertical control: the damping is exquisite. This, plus perfect balance, plus linear power delivery equals the confidence required to start manhandling the thing like it's an 819bhp Toyota GR86.

RICHARD LANE

LCC ROCKET

Driving a car isn't like riding a motorbike. Doesn't matter which car: the two things are not the same. But I did get closer to it than ever this year when a kind reader (thank you again) asked if I would like to have a go in his LCC Rocket.

As a reminder, this mid-engined, cigar-shaped road car from 1991 is powered by an 1100cc Yamaha bike engine and weighs less than 400kg. As a result, it needs unassisted everything and can be tickled along a road with bike-like smoothness and ease. Like on a bike, you can change its direction or change gear with just hints of movement from your body.

The engine isn't too fizzy, although it needs revving high to get the most out of it on the road: second gear runs to 90mph. But it's not like you can use 358bhp per tonne to its maximum on the road anyway, so you can make lovely progress through its mid-range, feeling in closer sync with the machine than I think I've ever done before on four wheels.

MATT PRIOR

our heads

year. These are the ones they can't stop thinking about

RENAULT 5

Predictable choice, I know – but when I managed to pilfer our long-term Renault 5 from its custodian, Steve Cropley, I was as impressed as I'd hoped to be.

First, there's the heritage: there are plenty of companies that are sceptical about looking backwards, but Renault is presently dining out on model names of old. My best friend had an original 5 as her first car, when we were in those early driving days of heady freedom, and this sort of nostalgia certainly helps the new 5 appeal.

Second, the looks: how good are these proportions? It reminds me a lot of the Honda E, which I was a big fan of at the time. The 5 is retro yet totally modern, and the best ones are the most brightly coloured.

Third, everything else. I drove it for a week: it had a respectable range for a supermini EV, was a joy to sit in and is a delight to drive.

But there's an added bonus to driving the 5: everyone loves it and will openly tell you so, which made me unexpectedly popular.

RACHEL BURGESS

ALPINE A390

I first experienced the A390 at the Car of the Year judging event at Tannis in September, and the first thing that took me by surprise was how good it looked. I'd seen pictures, of course, and thought it seemed striking but a bit… odd.

But in the weak Danish sunlight it looked properly marvellous: bold, well proportioned and refreshingly different to any other big saloon, fastback or SUV. More than that, it was clear before I'd crept out of the car park that it was going to feel like no other electric SUV or crossover.

It feels taut and alert: dialled into your inputs, even when you're just pottering around, with the stiffness of the chassis letting itself be known without corrupting the pliancy of the dampers. Find a corner that's worth putting some effort into and… good grief. It has a gorgeous, fingertippy feel that you would never expect of a fairly big electric GT. Like a Porsche Taycan but with a dose of old-school Lotus.

Is it flawless? Not at all. But I had an absolute ball driving it, and if electric cars can be this fun and this characterful, then that's something to celebrate.

VICKY PARROTT

BMW 120

I evaluated many newcomers this year, virtually all of which were a whacking great SUV, a life-complicating EV or a combination of both. Consequently the car that I enjoyed far above all others in 2025 wasn't at all innovative or even new: it was a small, modestly sporty, petrol-powered hatchback of a variety that has been familiar for two decades now.

The BMW 1 Series has accrued an unfortunate reputation or three in that time, stemming from its engineering compromises and certain groups of customers, but in today's context it suddenly seems fabulous – to me, at least. Its dimensions never had me questioning my own judgement, its three-cylinder turbo engine was punchy yet also cost-effective and its interior – admittedly creaking under the weight of every option in this case – was nothing short of luxurious.

Loath though I am to present as a Luddite, I can only conclude that old-school still rules.

KRIS CULMER

JEEP WRANGLER

The Wrangler is neither compact nor frugal; you don't drive it for reasons of either practicality or efficiency. But when going gets tight or money gets short, you tend to use it anyway, for the what-the-hell reason of enjoyment.

Underpinning everything is a cheerful, optimistic toughness that you sometimes find

KIA PV5

The PV5 was developed with a laser focus on usability, versatility, load capacity and economics. That's because the sort of people who will buy an electric van will base their decision on spreadsheet calculations and other wholly unemotional factors.

Yet despite that, this bold new entrant into the commercial vehicle sector is somehow utterly beguiling and likeable. It's charming in the way of the Suzuki Jimny or Citroën Ami, ensuring that you forgive its flaws in terms of dynamics, comfort and refinement because you're just too busy smiling to care.

Practicality is key to the PV5's charm. Everything is designed purely with fitness for purpose in mind, which makes it earnestly honest and intuitive. The interior is plain, simple, practical and hard-wearing, with storage compartments in the floor – the floor! – and no extraneous frippery or impractical styling details in an attempt to make it feel posh or premium or cool.

And it's thoroughly decent to drive. Fast? Meh. Exciting? Not really. Dynamic? Don't be daft: it's a van-based MPV. But in its fitness for purpose, the PV5 smashes it.

Best yet, there's a camper version on the way. Sign me up for the first wilderness expedition.

JAMES ATTWOOD

ROCKETEER MX-5

My favourite driver's cars tend to be small, light and rear-driven, with a charismatic engine and a manual gearbox. With its blueprinted quad-cam V6 and lightly breathed-on suspension, Rocketeer's Mk1 MX-5 was well up my street on paper, but I did have a slight sense of trepidation before driving it. It's fundamentally a 30-year-old Mazda convertible. Was I going to fit? Would it feel quite floppy? Would the suspension be up to it?

It turned out to be absolutely delightful. The engine gives off BMW M3 CSL vibes with its raspy sound and zingy response. I love the character of a big engine in a small, rear-drive car. It seems like there's no inertia when accelerating, and you end up speeding up, upshifting, then slowing down and heel-toe downshifting for the hell of it.

You can be out of Rocketeer's door with a nice turnkey build for less than £50,000. Not an insignificant amount of money, but this is a rare restomod that's actually quite attainable. And because it's not as shouty and look-at-me as most sporty cars, I could see myself driving it a ton.

ILLYA VERPRAET

in American cars. Once you've established this, the Wrangler starts to surprise you. Wind noise is quite acceptable for motorway cruising; road noise is okay; the upright seats look a bit sketchy but work well for distance driving; and stuff like the seat heaters, air-con, active cruise control and switches all work with modern elan. The steering is surprisingly quick and okay for all but long A-road corners taken on the limit, when a certain steering numbness around the straight-ahead raises its head.

I also love the Wrangler's timeless styling and am sure that I will feel the same in 10 years' time, which is why I have an odd notion that it doesn't have real rivals. Had our long-termer been transferred permanently to my place, I would have been overjoyed – and for a very long time.

STEVE CROPLEY

SAHARA
Jeep

BMW M2 CS

BMW has been extending its M brand for an awfully long time, adding fast SUVs, luxury convertibles and even the fully bespoke XM. Yet when you imagine an M car, it's a compact, rear-wheel-drive coupé. 'E30' M3, 'E9' CSL 'Batmobile', 2002 Turbo: these are cars with a stature that demands a modern inheritor. And the M2 CS feels fully up to the job.

It's a car defined by the little details, which come together to amount to something very special indeed. The shortened, stiffened suspension springs, and recalibrated wider running gear; the stiffened engine mounts, for a straight six boosted beyond 500bhp; the forged wheels, the carbonfibre brakes and the wider weight-saving programme that has resulted in it tipping the scales at 150kg less than the four-wheel-drive M4 Competition.

At every turn, you can feel the benefit of each little tweak and tune-up that it has received. Like everything in the car is rowing in perfect time, and all in the same direction.

It's not often a modern performance car feels quite that way – and more seldom still one for which you can pay less than £100,000.

MATT SAUNDERS

LOTUS EMIRA

In a world of huge SUVs and an increasing dependence on technology, a sports car from Hethel was the detox I needed.

Hydraulic steering, a manual gearbox and a roaring 400bhp supercharged 3.5-litre V6 behind my head. Phwoar. And all of this encased in one of the best-looking bodies currently on sale.

The Emira's rawness surprised me. It was fidgety, tracked quite aggressively and shifted its weight heavily if I sent too much power to the back wheels in one go. It felt more like a track car for the road than a road car that could be taken to the track.

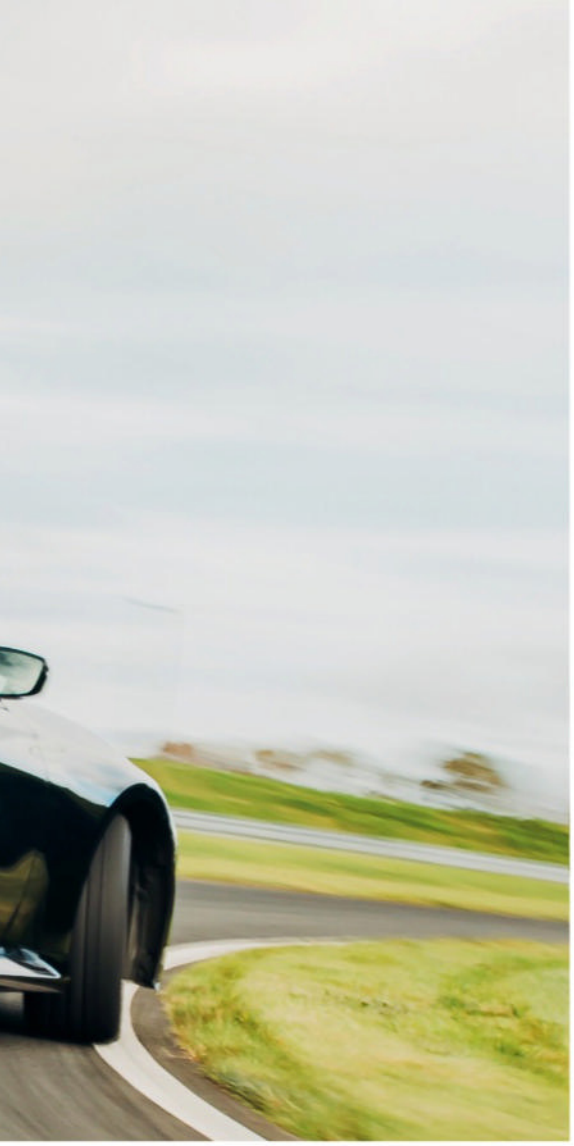
In short, it required ability to get the most out of it – and I loved it for that. This wasn't a car that anyone could just get in and drive; it was like a prize horse: you needed to bond with it, learn it and hone your skills to win it over. A challenge I would relish every day if I could.

WILL RIMELL

DS N°8

It won't be for everyone. Indeed, if it doesn't fare significantly better than its dismally performing predecessor, the DS 9, I might never see another one on the road. But that would be a great shame. Because while the oddly named DS N°8 is hardly the most adventurously conceived of cars, it is wilfully individualistic to the point of esotericism, and what would the car world be without those heroic left-fielders valiantly championing the value of doing things differently?

And, as a little bonus, it drives really nicely.



Not especially quick, far less cushioned than its 1950s Citroën namesake and some way short of fun in the corners but decently composed and refined, with the added bonus of having a colossal 466-mile maximum range to bolster its cross-continental cruising credentials.

People don't buy big executive saloons without a German badge any more. So rather than build a doomed me-too BMW 5 Series-chaser, DS has gone its own way and created something that carves its own path – and, in this era of box-checking identikit design, it's heartening to see that some companies are still willing to experiment. Residual values be damned.

FELIX PAGE

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH VOLANTE

When I wrote this review back in July, I nearly ran out of superlatives to describe Gaydon's most powerful and expensive roadster.

I don't understand Ferrari's current design language and McLaren supercars still have a whiff of IT department about them. Aston, meanwhile, just seems to be consistently knocking it out of the park. The latest Vanquish is emblematic of a company on the up and up: it's stunning, especially in Volante form. And it's all surprisingly delicate.

That 5.2-litre V12 engine's peak output – all 824bhp of it – doesn't kick until 6500rpm, and when it arrives, it hits hard. A clever bit of torque-shaping in GT mode helps it arrive cleanly and in a linear manner through the first four gears, but in Sport+ mode it's rampant.

And the best thing? There's no downside to it being a Volante. I'm sure Max Verstappen could tease out some dynamic differences between the coupé and the convertible on a track, but on UK roads I couldn't.

MURRAY SCULLION

MORGAN SUPERSPORT

The view that greets a Supersport driver is one of the best in modern motordom: a long, sleek bonnet, swooping wheel arches and diminutive, spotlight-style headlamps ensure this car is characteristically true to Morgans of yore.

But what sets the Supersport apart from its forebears is its ease of use, practicality and ultimately its more accomplished drive. The BMW 'B58' straight six under that endless bonnet is a fabulous old stager that's brimming with character. It's smooth, torquey and the ideal wingman for this Morgan: knock it into Sport and you're treated to all kinds of pops and bangs on overrun. But it's the whooshing sound of the turbochargers that adds real drama on the fly.

And because it weighs only 1170kg, the Supersport is seriously quick, with the right amount of deployable power that you can actually relish on a British B-road. Factor in its pliant ride, excellent steering and overall composure and it genuinely does feel like a left-field Porsche 911 alternative at last.

SAM PHILLIPS

PRIDE OF THE FLEET

Over the past year, we've run 36 long-term test cars. Which will we remember fondest? **FELIX PAGE** counts the votes

Winner
MAZDA MX-5

WHOOPS, WE LOST THE KEYS

The car we would have kept forever

There can be absolutely no debate about the winner of this award, not just because it received the most votes from team members who would have kept it forever, but also because one of its nominators actually did – sort of.

"I went out and placed a deposit on an MX-5, so effusive was the praise of those who drove Autocar's long-termer," said Charlie Martin. "I've had it for a year now and can confirm it's as brilliant as they said." How's that for peer pressure (and a statement of the indomitable influence of Autocar's reviews)?

Now we all must look on jealously as our colleague enjoys weekend after blissful weekend at the wheel of his own gorgeously specced 2.0-litre roadster, of the same type that was so cruelly wrenched from our clutches by its owner after a few thousand glorious miles on our fleet earlier this year.

Keeper Murray Scullion said our particular specification was his "idea of a perfect MX-5", and although Illya Verpraet thought it "a sad state of affairs that there was no rear-driven, manual coupé with more than four cylinders to choose from", he begrudgingly admitted that he would give a permanent home to the MX-5 "if I must". Sorry to impose such a hardship.

With the second-most votes in this category – despite sitting right at the other end of the automotive spectrum – was the hulking, go-anywhere Jeep Wrangler. A lovesick Steve Cropley called it an "excellent old stalwart" whose innumerable charms outweigh its undeniable flaws, while Sergiu Avram hailed it as being "much easier to live with" than the similarly conceived Ineos Grenadier. Slightly worryingly, he also said "it might just be the best car to tackle a zombie uprising too". Does he know something we don't?

“I’m surprised my laptop’s ‘R’ and ‘5’ keys haven’t crumbled away”

Winner
RENAULT 5

NO ALARMS AND NO SURPRISES

The car that was most fit for purpose

I’m surprised the ‘R’ and ‘5’ keys on my laptop haven’t crumbled away through overuse this year, so much ink have we spilled in coverage of this excellent supermini, which has quickly become an industry benchmark – not just for small EVs but small cars in general, notching up a dizzying amount of awards since its launch. And here’s yet another to cram into Boulogne-Billancourt’s bulging trophy cabinet.

“Aside from its fabulous looks, this is just an ideal city car, so punchy, smooth and quiet – and for urbanites, a short range is irrelevant,” said Kris Culmer of the dinky yellow Renault. Matt Saunders agreed: “It’s superb at nipping about, as well as being cheery and great at making every little journey and interaction feel special. You would look forward to almost every short trip.”

Steve Cropley did precisely that for several months, hailing it as “just all-round brilliant”, even though he lives right out in the countryside.

The plucky Dacia Duster was also deemed mighty good at just doing what it says on the tin. “It’s all the car you could ever need,” said Will Rimell, who used it for a 135-mile daily commute, took it off-roading and even slept in the back of it to prove his argument. “Few models can match the Duster for fulfilling its brief,” chimed in Jack Warrick, while Sergiu Avram was awestruck by the bargain off-roader’s “ability to deliver on virtually everything it sets out to do”.

Runner-up JEEP WRANGLER

Runner-up DACIA DUSTER

Winner
SKODA SUPERB

ARE WE THERE YET?

The best car for long distances

Another landslide, another foregone conclusion. The diesel-powered Skoda Superb Estate proved so brilliantly adept at gulping down vast swathes of land during its time with us that it took more votes than the other nominees combined.

Richard Lane nabbed the big wagon for a return trip from London to Salzburg via Paris, "in all weathers", and was blown away: "It averaged more than 50mpg and was consistently comfy. Stunning car." Illya Verpraet, shortly after awarding this very car a rare five-star road test verdict, agreed: "You still can't beat a quiet, frugal and effortless diesel engine for mile-munching. Add in exquisite seats and a frustration-free package and 1000 miles will pass by in a flash."

Most of the Superb's advocates, though, conceded that the equally, erm, superb Bentley Bentayga was also a pretty fine means of getting from A to Z. Even if, as James Attwood noted, that's probably partly because "the farther you drive, the more distance you will put between yourself and the judgemental stares from passers-by".

I'm not so sure, though. I took our long-termer (complete with £21,000 Satin Flame paintwork) to visit some family up north and never exactly felt like I blended in.

Special commendation to the Tesla Model 3 here too. Alastair Clements fondly recalled a "slightly mad 1200-mile dash to Fort William and back" at the helm of our ubiquitous electric saloon, praising its comfortable dynamic character, long range and associated Supercharger network for making even the most arduous of on-road endeavours appealing.

Runner-up BENTLEY BENTAYGA

YEAH BUT, NO BUT

The most hotly debated car

Winner
JAECOO 7

GIZ' A GO!

The car you wish you had driven

Winner
MORGAN SUPER 3

Runner-up VOLVO EX30

It says it all that when I was compiling the 2024 edition of this feature, I had never even heard of Jaecoo, but now, just 12 short months later, the name of this Chinese upstart is on everyone's lips, with it having claimed a 2% share of the UK market off the back of huge demand for its Evoque-alike 7 crossover.

Charlie Martin said "it's shocking how quickly these are selling, despite driving pretty poorly by most accounts". Mark Tisshaw wasn't so taken aback by its success, though: "It's so successful because it's cheap and there's a big dealer network already up and running." Will Rimell, meanwhile, was just annoyed that it has garnered such popularity despite "looking like a copycat Range Rover".

There was another Chinese-made crossover on our fleet this year that likewise seemed to spark debate everywhere it went: the Volvo EX30.

Murray Scullion observed that this EV "continues to cause a stir" largely because it's brilliant to drive and looks great but is notoriously short on physical controls, which makes it difficult to get along with – as Matt Prior noted in his unflinching 2.5-star first drive verdict two years ago.

Steve Cropley felt similarly conflicted: "I like the size and the styling, but I've been scared off the instrumentation."

However, the EX30's keeper, James Attwood, reckons it's all a lot of fuss for nothing. "I'm a bit scared to tell Prior that I quite like it and don't mind the touchscreen that much," he said.

Sounds like grounds for a dust-up, but thankfully, rather like in a Volvo interior, our interactions are rarely physical.

Runner-up DACIA DUSTER

Most votes went to the Super 3 here, and none was more emphatically argued than my own. I specified the damned thing – an extremely amusing and liberating endeavour – but, with no garage in which to store it, no helmet to wear while driving it and no indication that my partner would consider getting in it with me, I admitted defeat and left it to those better able to sample its innumerable charms.

As did Jack Warrick, who was "green with envy" at keeper Matt Prior's Morgan exploits, while similarly hard-done-by Charlie Martin lamented that he didn't get to test his theory that "you could take this trike into Knightsbridge of a Saturday afternoon and attract more attention than any million-pound hypercar".

An unlikely nomination for the Dacia Duster came from James Attwood, who said: "I really liked our Bentayga but suspect buying a whole SUV for basically the price of the Bentley's paint represents better value for money."

Winner
CITROEN E-C3

CHECK THIS OUT!

The best feature, function or quirk

Stunning performance figures, long electric ranges and mind-blowing in-car technology are all just great, but often when you're telling your mates about your new car, it's the little things you find yourself mentioning first. And that's why, in a year that we had a £250k Bentley, a three-wheeled Morgan and a space-age Polestar SUV on our fleet, to name but a few highlights, it's the comparatively unspecial but perfectly acceptable Citroën ë-C3 that scoops the award for best feature.

Why? "Because it has a key that you have to put into the ignition to make the car work," explained James Attwood. "I actually love this. But then I am getting old." There's much to be said for the reassuringly tactile experience of inserting and twisting a good ol' fashioned key to get going, even without the familiar whirring of an engine's starter motor to accompany it.

Runners-up included the drain-equipped, 145-litre 'Gigabox' under the boot floor of the Ford Puma Gen-E, the Ineos Grenadier's yacht-like switchgear panel and the video games you can play while charging the Tesla Model 3.

But the second-most fun thing you can have in a new car in 2025, after an ignition key, has to be a karaoke machine, doesn't it? Yes, really. Jack Warrick had one in his BYD Dolphin Surf and, as an encore to his extensive Taylor Swift repertoire, was quick to sing its praises: "Charging stops just became far less boring. And louder. Only £90 for a pair of dedicated microphones, too."

THE COMMUTE EXTENDER

The most fun car

This is starting to feel a bit like judging a Rolling Stones performance at a school talent show.

Kris Culmer said "no other car allows you to have so much fun at sensible speeds" as the Mazda MX-5; Jack Warrick said "few cars strike such a perfect balance between engagement, comfort and drop-top thrills"; and Matt Saunders said "it's probably the most fun car in the world, because it's usable enough to take places and do things in, it's palatable over long trips and can light up any stretch of twisties at the end of it all".

Unsurprisingly, MX-5 owner and perpetual hype man Charlie Martin was keen to justify its win here: "Revvy engine, ideally placed controls and styling that's cute enough to pacify all but the angriest onlookers. Plus skids. Lots of skids."

After that deluge of unadulterated fawning, Mark Tisshaw felt no need to explain his vote. "Because it's an MX-5," he offered after a prod.

It wouldn't do to gloss over the many months of delightful motoring also afforded to us by the Morgan Super 3 this year. Will Rimell noted that "with your bum on the road and no need to go above 30mph to crack a smile, it's the easy answer". And Illya Verpraet was positively glowing in his view of the marvellous Malvernite: "Nothing turns a mundane trip to the shops into an exciting adventure like a car that is missing a roof and doors, not to mention a big chunk of contact patch. Three-pot perfection with a manual gearbox and all the good noises."

Runner-up MORGAN SUPER 3

Winner
MAZDA MX-5

Runner-up **BYD DOLPHIN SURF**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

THE KIND OF MAKES SENSE IN A NICHE WAY AWARD

MINI ACEMAN

The Aceman is flawed, but I can see a place for it. If you want a small but tall premium electric car with a great interior and you don't hugely care about range or ride comfort, this is your go-to. **MSc**

THE SO NEAR YET SO FAR AWARD

MG CYBERSTER

Looks good, largely drives well and is unique in its positioning, so it's a shame that it just misses the mark. With some better rear suspension, conventional doors and a major software redesign, it could be great. **AC**

THE DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH AWARD

POLESTAR 3

There's a wonderful car in here, begging to get out. The dynamics and looks are definitely where they need to be, but the ergonomics are lacking. **RL**

THE McBUSTED AWARD FOR BEST COLLABORATION

FORD EXPLORER

Badge engineering happens; it's not a bad thing. Nor is the Explorer a bad car. So who cares if it's a Ford on a Volkswagen platform? **JA**

THE MARTIN LEWIS AWARD FOR DOING MORE WITH LESS

SUZUKI SWIFT

There are few frills and it's not intended as a driver's car, but it just happens to be a lot of fun to rev out that little three-pot engine and throw around this sensibly sized hatchback that weighs less than a tonne. Even when thrashed mercilessly, it still does 60mpg. **IV**

THE SURPRISE GEM OF THE YEAR AWARD

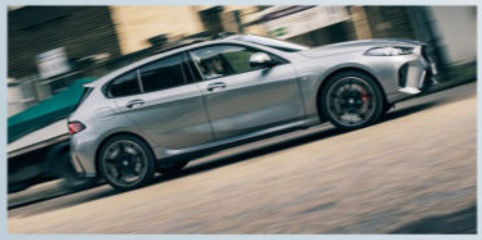
SKODA ELROQ

VW's MEB EV platform has spewed out some forgettable cars, so I expected more of the same here – but I was very wrong. It has superb rolling refinement and a brilliant everyday ride-and-handling blend. The best 4.5m-ish EV yet made, and there have been many. Just none as good as this. **MT**

THE JUDE BELLINGHAM AWARD FOR ALL-ROUND ABILITY

BMW 120

This hatchback was everything I want of a car – combustion-engined, small, sporty, fully loaded with goodies, efficient – and rare in not annoying me with its ADAS. **KC**



THE MIKE McCARTNEY AWARD FOR AN OVERLOOKED SIBLING

RENAULT SCENIC

In all the noise about the 5, it's easy to forget that Renault also makes a pretty sublime electric family SUV. The Scenic is less obviously remarkable but extremely pleasant to live with nonetheless. **FP**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A

VOLVO V90

SCANDI-COOL OLD SCHOOL

V90 gives the trad family car a sleek exec design twist – and is now £8k

Think of a large family estate car. You're picturing a Volvo, aren't you? Although the XC90 is the Volvo de choix for big families these days, the more traditional V90 estate still holds massive appeal, having only recently bowed out of production after nearly a decade. And not just because it's one of the prettiest wagons around.

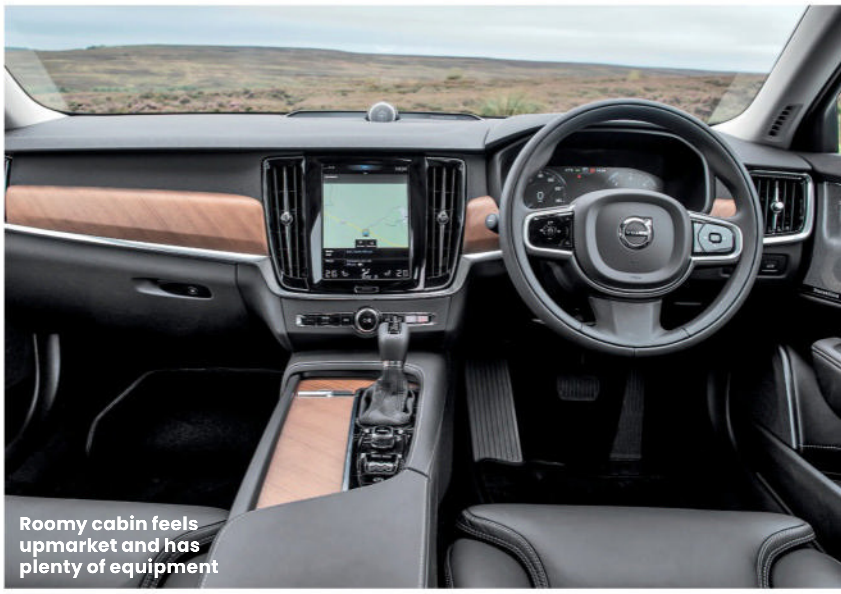
The second car to use Volvo's then newfangled SPA platform, it arrived as a long, low and sculptural model like no Volvo estate before it – and its strong Scandi-chic design still looks clean and fresh today.

The by-product of its added kerb appeal is that it is not quite as utilitarian and practical as its breeze-block forebears – the sloping rear screen precludes the fitment of a third row of seats, for example – but the boot is still a competitive 560 litres, even in the PHEV, and four occupants have plenty of space (although a fifth makes it tighter).

For outright space, the Skoda Superb, Volkswagen Passat and Mercedes E-Class have it beat, but if you're looking for something that's in equal parts stylish, relaxing and practical, the V90 should be right up the top of your list with the Audi A6, BMW 5 Series and Jaguar XF.

The interior is family-friendly but still very stylish. All the materials look and feel expensive, and the 9.0in portrait touchscreen still looks modern, even if it can be laggy (see Buyer Beware, opposite), which is grating because of the dearth of physical controls…

Equipment is generous. Even entry-level Momentum trim has LED headlights, heated leather



Roomy cabin feels upmarket and has plenty of equipment

What we said then

11 NOVEMBER 2020

"The V90 represents Volvo at its very best. It doesn't try to be the most dynamic, engaging car in its class. Instead, it counts suave design, a heightened focus on safety, exceptional rolling refinement, impressive practicality and impeccable roundedness as its star attributes."

seats, sat-nav, Bluetooth, adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist and DAB radio. On top of that, it has a powered bootlid, keyless start and rear parking sensors.

Used Inscription cars cost about 10% more than like-for-like Momentum models and get extra interior lighting, nappa leather seats and a larger, 12.3in digital instrument cluster, plus electric front seats and bigger alloys.

R-Design models have held their value best and offer firmer suspension for a sportier drive – but bear in mind that the V90 is very much a wafty and hushed cruiser, especially on adaptive dampers, and the R-Design's big wheels and stiffer dampers do unsettle the ride.

Handling is good across the board, though. The V90 has an encouraging level of body control for its size and supple set-up so can be briskly hustled along a twisty road.

All powertrains are based around a 2.0-litre engine, initially the 187bhp T4 petrol or D4 diesel, the 232bhp D5 or 247bhp T5, or the top-link 306bhp T6. The highest-power petrol and diesel came with four-wheel drive, but they have a poor reliability record, so we would recommend the torquey D4 (expect mid-40s to the gallon) or pokey T5 (around 30mpg). The T4 is gutless and no more efficient than a T5.

All V90s are automatic, which is generally fine but early cars can be a bit jerky and hesitant.

If you have a home charger and are tempted by the blisteringly quick 401bhp T8 PHEV, note that there are well-documented problems and you'll get only 20 miles of EV running on a good day.

The V90 is a useful tow car, with the D5 and T6 rated for 2200kg and even the PHEVs being capable of pulling 2100kg. It's a workhorse, then, like all good Volvo estates have been, but with the tech and panache to slip into premium exec duties effortlessly. What more can you ask of a car that starts at £8k?

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

Comfortable, sure-footed progress is a V90 strong suit

"It's a workhorse but with the tech and panache to slip into premium exec duties effortlessly"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

SARAH HUGHES

"I ran a D4 R-Design for three years and 60,000 miles. For a car of its size, the economy was strong, hitting high-40s on a motorway run. The comfort is the biggest selling point: I've never sat in a better seat. The Pilot Assist [adaptive cruise and steering] made motorway journeys easy and the overall interior design and quality are hard to beat. Nothing broke, although the Sensus infotainment did occasionally have a 'Matrix moment' where it just froze and needed a restart to clear. My biggest gripe was the gearbox; it was often dim-witted and hesitant when pulling away."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

The high-output D5 (later B5) and T6 (later B6) use Volvo's PowerPulse compressed air system to spool the turbos quickly, reducing lag. Failure of the air compressor or associated hoses in this system is an occasional fault, leading to a loss of immediate performance, and can be expensive to fix.

■ ELECTRIC MOTOR

Owners of plug-in hybrid T8s have reported a systemic issue with the 'ERAD', or EV motor, on the rear axle. These often fail after the warranty expires and £10,000 should be budgeted to fix it. So have it thoroughly checked out before purchase.

■ SUSPENSION

Higher trims often feature rear or full air suspension. While it provides a superb, floaty ride and self-levelling, the air springs and compressors are prone to leaks and failure over time. Look for the car sitting unevenly when parked, and check for suspension warning messages on the dash. Volvo refuses to cover the system in extended warranties.

■ BODY

The optional panoramic sunroof's drain tubes can become clogged with debris, causing water to accumulate and potentially leak into the cabin or damage the electronic modules located near the headliner.

■ INFOTAINMENT

The touchscreen has a tendency to lag and there are very few buttons to fall back on. Total crashes are usually solved by turning it off and on again.

V90s from 2016 and 2017 need a 3G sim to offer wi-fi. Coverage will soon end, so if this bothers you, choose a newer model.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The V90 was facelifted in 2020 with some small but important changes. The petrol Ts and Ds became Bs, with the addition of mild-hybrid technology, which doesn't make the world of difference to economy or performance but it's nice to have if your budget stretches.

The hybrid line-up expanded, with a new 335bhp T6 offering a claimed 35 miles of EV range initially, before being upgraded with a new battery to 53 miles in 2022. The T8 also received this and a bump in power to 449bhp. Note that without any electrical assistance, the PHEVs will struggle to break 35mpg.

Core, Plus and Ultimate replaced the previous trim levels.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£8000-£12,999

Cars with over 100k miles and some with more than double that.

£13,000-£19,999

A range of pre-facelifted cars, from Momentums with average miles to top-spec, low-mile T8s.

£20,000-£32,999

A wide choice of facelifted models, including the last of the mild-hybrid petrols and diesels.

£33,000-£55,000

Plug-in hybrids from the last few years of production.

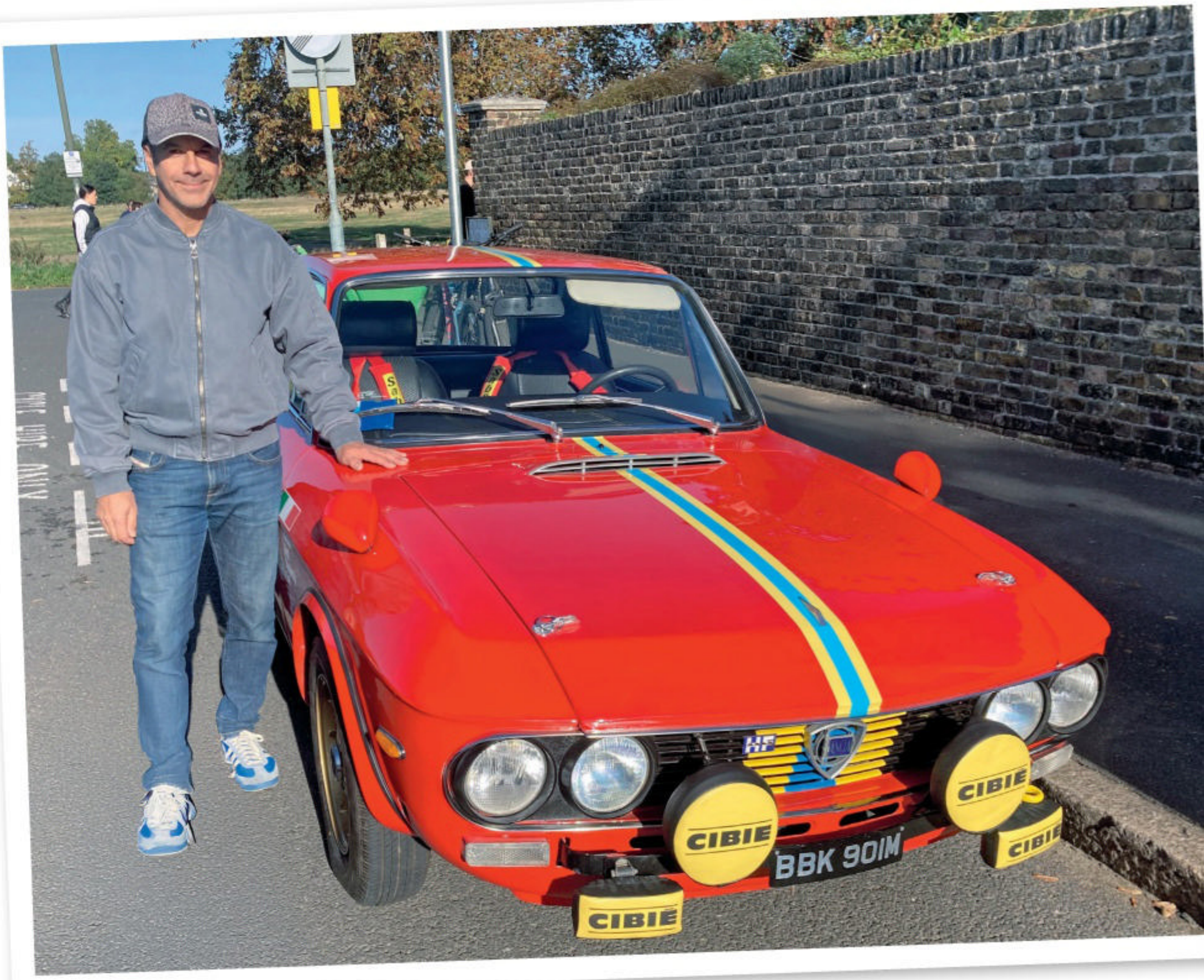
ONE WE FOUND

VOLVO V90 D4 MOMENTUM, 2016, 66,500 MILES, £14,000

This D4 Momentum has everything you could possibly need. It comes with a full Volvo service history, a long MOT and modest-sized alloy wheels – great for comfort and economy.

My car & I

'Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow...'



Giuseppe Minetti is looking forward to winter in London at the wheel of his 1973 Lancia Fulvia 1.3 S. "Winters here aren't that bad but when it gets super-slippery, I'll definitely take it for a drive. Because these cars were designed for loose gravel and uneven surfaces, it will come into its own. The Fulvia is front-wheel drive but is designed so you can get the back end drifting out. Its very skinny tyres help," he says.

If you hadn't already guessed, Giuseppe is Italian to his boots and has owned more than 30 Italian cars. "Apart from two Alfa 156 GTAs that I owned, most have been high-revving models like the Fulvia," he says. "I've had GTVs, an Alfa Giulia 105, which was stunning, four Alfa Spiders, six X1/9s... I've had only three non-Italian cars and they didn't last long."

He's owned the Fulvia for just six weeks. "It's the Monte Carlo special-edition version with flared wheel arches, which, when it left the factory, would have looked like the 1.6 HF rally car that won the 1972 Monte Carlo Rally," he says. "It's finished all in red now, but when it was new it would have had the matt black bonnet and bootlid of the rally cars, intended to reduce reflections from headlights during

Our cars

Can you spot the bodywork repairs?

BY STEVE CROPLEY

Two significant recent events in my Alpine's life: I now have it back from some concerning corrosion repair in perfect condition, and I've also been driving it against an A110 of greater potential and rarity, the A110 R.

The repair came about because some factory wiseacre decided to build Alpines using steel clips to hold the wing liners in place beneath the car's aluminium body panels. As every school kid knows, steel and aluminium react: the upshot was bubbling in my car's wings.

Alpine accepted my warranty claim and the front wings were replaced. Lesser problems with the rear arches were repaired. Both sides of the car were skilfully repainted, and after three weeks the car came back home. My own careful eyeballing detected absolutely no sign of any repair, so I'm happy.

Front wings have been replaced and both sides repainted

The A110 R drive occurred at Prescott hillclimb, where Alpine had a dynamic UK launch for the A290 hot hatch. I was deeply impressed after doing a road route in the R, which has near-perfect steering and beautiful damping, plus some more poke. However, what made me happiest was that, though brilliant, it wasn't sufficiently better than mine to make me want to spend the £40k to change, if I had it. If the R is a 98/100 car, my basic 2021 A110 Pure is at least 92. It's not often you drive something twice the price of a car you own that increases your happiness with what you've got.

Both rear wings were repaired

"I use it every day and park it in the street. I'm not precious about it. It has to be used"

Giuseppe's Lancia Fulvia is a Monte Carlo special edition, bought for £20k

Bucket seats are original; V4 (below) has been tweaked

night stages. Fortunately, my car still has the bucket seats that it was supplied with.

"It had a ground-up restoration in Rome 10 years ago. Fulvia Classics in Longwick then imported it and sold it to a chap who had the black painted over. I think it looks better this way. The only things I don't like are the fake bonnet catches. I'd prefer they were real," he says.

Giuseppe bought the car in a private sale for £20,000. "I've got all the documented history and the photos recording its restoration. I use it every day and have done more than 400 miles taking the kids to school, going shopping and just driving around aimlessly, enjoying it. I park it in the street. I'm not precious about it. It has to be used," he says.

Remarkably, the Fulvia's 1300cc engine is a V4. "The two cylinder banks are so close together that it has only one head," says Giuseppe. "So that the car could have a low bonnet, the engine is canted over. It has twin carburettors and out of the factory it produced about 98hp. It's since been tweaked to make a little more. It's very rev-happy and redlines at 6500rpm. The previous owner fitted a custom-made exhaust that makes a great sound. You're not sure if it's a V4 or if it's a motorbike engine. It has a lovely rasp.

"The car weighs less than one tonne. It's quick enough off the mark but it's the in-gear performance that is impressive. The five-speed gearbox has a dog-leg first so that second and third are straight down so you can make quick changes. Technically, it's a very straightforward car – there aren't a lot of electrics – and basic servicing is simple."

Simple enough for Giuseppe to fix a persistent petrol leak? "I often drive with the windows down because the cabin occasionally reeks of petrol," he says. "The kids joke that they know when I've been for a drive because I smell of the stuff!"

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

WILL RIMELL

1981 CITROEN VISA GTi

VS

KRIS CULMER

2002 PROTON SATRIA 1.8 16V GTI

Brief: Find a forgotten hot hatch that deserves a second chance for under £10,000

WR I've found a Citroën with the same 115bhp 1.6-litre four that powers the Peugeot 205 GTi – and it's quite a steal at £6584. Rare too.

KC Hot hatches are all about fun handling, so the ideal would be a Lotus. And that's just what I have here, in a cherished £3995 Satria GTI. The badges say Proton, but Hethel did the chassis and peak-era Mitsubishi provided the engine.

WR Oh, Kris, that is a gem, though my car will get people looking, and that's the main point of a hot hatch. I think it's properly cool. But parts look quite expensive…

KC Obtaining parts can be a pain with a Proton too. Thankfully, the seller of my Satria has recently refreshed absolutely loads.

WR Maybe there's a reason these are forgotten hatches… I think I'd be happier spending another £4k-£5k on a lower-end 205 GTi and paying for it to be fixed with parts that are easier to source. Yet how will I then be able to tell the random bloke down the pub I'm driving one of only two Visa GTis in the UK? Sod it, I'm making my bed.

KC I also have a penchant for obscurity, so this Proton would beat the Peugeot for me too. However, a rando in the pub striking up a conversation with me about his old Citroën is my worst nightmare…

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

MASERATI MC20

2021, 13,000 miles, £126,990

New, the mid-engined MC20 would have set you back at least £190k. So this 2021 example is superb value for money, but you won't buy this elegant Italian supercar based on its price. You'll buy it for its rich, bassy V6 and pseudo-GT drive.

ABARTH 695 70TH ANNIVERSARIO

2020, 49,000 miles, £18,799

Much like the Fiat 500 on which it is based, there's a horde of limited-edition 695s and the 70th-anniversary model is one of the best. It gets a rorty Record Monza exhaust, adjustable rear spoiler, striking two-tone paint and a limited-slip differential.

ALFA ROMEO SPIDER VELOCE 2000

1991, 90,000 miles, £16,950

The excellent condition of this Spider reflects the significant funds spent on its upkeep. In the past five years, it had new lower panels, anti-roll bars, clutch, brakes and more. It is said by the seller to drive "very well".

FIAT 126

1990, 24,000 miles, £5950

This sweet-looking 704cc Fiat 126 may have about as much gusto as a golf buggy, but it is certainly not short of Italian charm. It has done only 24,000 miles from new and is kept in a garage by its current owner.

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

“Lotus and Virgin performed respectably”, we said, but that was a minority view

The embarrassing new team fiasco of F1 2010

Two new teams will join Formula 1 next season, both owned by world-famous car makers – one built up from scratch (Cadillac), the other a significant expansion of an established midfielder (Audi). This is an incredibly rare occurrence in the modern era – and it could hardly be more different from the last time multiple newcomers arrived.

The global economy imploded in 2008, damaging the automotive industry particularly heavily – and this after a period of spiralling costs in F1. Motorsport's governing body, the FIA, had to leap into action to ensure the series would survive.

Having initially mooted a budget cap of around £140 million (half the outgoings of the biggest spenders) in January 2008, and presumably spurred on by Honda's abrupt exit at the end of that season, the FIA announced in March 2009 that a budget cap of merely £30m would be in place for 2010 – although it would be optional, rewarded by additional technical freedoms.

This enraged the Formula One Teams Association, led by Ferrari's Luca di Montezemolo, who stated: “FOTA would like to express its disappointment and concern at the fact that these [decisions] have been taken in a unilateral manner. The framework of the regulations as defined by the FIA to be applicable from 2010 runs the risk of turning on its head the very essence of Formula 1 and the principles that make it one of the most popular and appealing sports.”

The FIA and FOTA each refused to back down, and for a while it really did seem the establishment would act on their threat of quitting to set up their own grand prix series.

Around the same time, the FIA started tendering for fresh entrants – and, despite the all-pervading financial strife, attracted a slew of applicants, presumably encouraged by the prospect of the budget cap.

This “rag bag varied from the strongly credible to the positively laughable”, opined Autocar. In the former group were Prodrive and Lola; in the latter Sky Sports Italia – yes, a TV station – and MyF1Dream, which would be run online by fans.

New teams saw other cars only when lapped

Stefan and its ex-Toyota car were rejected

Four were accepted: Manor, a British junior series team; Lotus Racing, created by a consortium of Malaysian businesses; Campos Meta, a Spanish tie-up of a junior series team and a marketing firm; and US F1, the idea of a motorsport engineer and an F1 journalist.

It was a good thing, too, because BMW and Toyota decided to quit F1 during 2009, followed by Renault giving up full control of its team.

By the time the F1 circus rocked up in Bahrain for the first event of 2010, though, things had drastically changed. The cap had been abandoned; Manor was called Virgin, having been funded to fruition by Richard Branson; the Spaniards were a different lot called Hispania; US F1 was defunct, having never finished designing its car; and another new team had flown out race equipment despite not having an entry.

This was Stefan GP, named after Serbian entrepreneur Zoran Stefanović. He had bought vital assets from Toyota, including its 2010 car – which some claimed was quick enough to fight for the title – and signed Toyota test driver Kazuki Nakajima and 1997 F1 champion Jacques Villeneuve.

Stefanović was ultimately never granted an entry, however, and his complaint to the European Commission was waved away.

Ferrari had publicly expressed a preference for the grid to be fleshed out by third cars from top teams, and it was vindicated when the newcomers, despite having speed and experience in their cockpits, qualified 4.7sec to 9.9sec off pole.

“It's embarrassing,” said Red Bull racer Mark Webber. “It's incredible that people who haven't yet turned a wheel take part in grands prix. It's the sort of stuff from Mickey Mouse or Tom and Jerry. It would make more sense to field Valentino Rossi with his [MotoGP] bike on the grid.”

Things didn't get much better for them in the race, as just a sole Lotus reached the finish, two laps down.

Then Virgin had to beg for special permission to modify its car – much trumpeted as the first ever designed entirely using computational fluid dynamics – because its fuel tank wasn't big enough for all the races.

In pre-season testing, Jarno Trulli had told us that he was “resigned to being right at the back for the first four races”. As it transpired, neither his Lotus team nor Virgin nor Hispania would ever close the deficit, and all were gone by 2017.

KRIS CULMER

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ROAD TEST RESULTS

Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into that century of road testing with a subscription to the digital Autocar archive (visit themagazineshop.com/2025ED/ACA).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

		0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH						
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	25.3.09	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	9.8.23	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	26.2.14	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO						
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	29.3.17	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	3.1.18	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	9.1.19	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	28.6.23	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE						
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	16.5.18	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	9.3.22	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	15.11.23	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL						
Atom 4 ★★★★★ Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	9.10.19	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN						
Vantage ★★★★⯪ Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	18.9.24	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	21.11.18	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	26.3.25	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	30.11.22	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI						
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	2.10.19	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	18.11.20	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆ Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	9.7.25	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	15.1.25	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 E-Hybrid Launch Edition Quattro ★★★☆☆ Big executive saloon is spec-dependent – and misses its marks here.	1.10.25	5.8	5.2	2197	40.0	52
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	16.4.25	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	5.2.25	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	11.7.18	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	17.6.20	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	26.6.19	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	2.6.21	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	9.11.16	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	20.3.19	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	7.7.21	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆ Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	14.5.25	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	2.10.24	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	12.8.15	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	26.10.16	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	26.9.18	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	30.12.15	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	2.4.25	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY						
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	18.5.16	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	24.4.24	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	22.12.21	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	19.4.23	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	16.4.25	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	17.8.22	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★½☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★½	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★½	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★½	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★½	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★½☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★½☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
750e xDrive M Sport	★★★★½	15.10.25	Look beyond its divisive design for a highly accomplished limousine.	4.8	4.2	2472	35.6	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★½	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★½☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★½☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★½☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★½	9.7.25	Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
XM 50e	★★★☆☆	12.11.25	Succeeds neither as a driver's car nor as a luxury SUV.	5.0	4.4	2639	25.0	57
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★½	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Dolphin Surf Boost	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.	12.0	13.0	1385	3.9	173
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★½☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
Sealion 7 Comfort	★★★☆☆	5.11.25	Not quite the swish, advanced, sophisticated EV they would have you believe.	6.5	5.2	-	2.7	272

CATERHAM

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★½	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★½	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★½☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★½☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Hybrid 136 Max	★★★½☆	22.10.25	Keenly priced and cleverly packaged – if you order with care.	9.3	8.6	1381	41.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★½☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★½☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★½☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★½☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★½	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★½	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★½	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★½☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★½☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★½☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★½☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★½☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★½☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★½	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★½	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select	★★★★☆	4.6.25	Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★½☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★½☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★½☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★½☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium	★★★½☆	2.7.25	PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.	9.7	9.5	1876	40.3	64
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★½	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GEELY

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX5	★★☆☆☆	26.11.25	Chinese brand's first car in the UK is generally acceptable, but mostly mediocre transport.	7.4	5.9	-	2.9	195

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★½☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★½☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★½☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★½☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★½☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★½☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R	★★★★☆	10.9.25	Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.	5.4	4.5	1417	37.4	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★½☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
Inster 49kWh Long Range 02	★★★½☆	24.9.25	Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.	9.6	8.8	-	3.3	179
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★½☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★½	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★½☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★½☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★½☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

ISUZU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
D-Max Arctic Trucks AT35	★★★☆☆	19.11.25	Noisy and slow but tough and ready for rough treatment.	10.5	11.9	2291	28.4	-

JAECOO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★½☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★½	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★½☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★½☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD	★★½☆☆	4.6.25	Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★½☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★½☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-

TOP 3

EVs WITH THE LONGEST RANGE

1 BMW iX3

2 Mercedes-Benz CLA EQ

3 Mercedes-Benz EQS

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

2000 MASERATI 3200 GT AUTOMATIC

Update makes 3200 GT "almost unrecognisable under the skin" two years after it arrived with "poor steering, horrid throttle response and an unyielding ride". "It's much more of the sports car than we imagined it could ever be" and "the best Maserati in 20 years".

Price £62,950
Engine V8, 3217cc, petrol
Power 370bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 362lb ft at 4500rpm
Weight 1565kg
0-60mph 6.2sec
0-100mph 14.7sec
Top speed 155mph
Economy 16.5mpg

1971 BMW 2002Tii

BMW belatedly offers Brits a hot version of the little 1600 saloon: the 2002 Turismo Internazionale Iniezione. "High-compression, fuel-injection engine gives it superb performance". There is "good handling except in extreme cases" and it's "quiet and comfortable", too.

Price £2313
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1990cc, petrol
Power 130bhp at 5800rpm
Torque 131lb ft at 4500rpm
Weight 1185kg
0-60mph 8.3sec
0-100mph 28.2sec
Top speed 118mph
Economy 25.4mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

*For three weeks from publication date

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Soul EV Urban ★★★½☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★½☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★½☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★½☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Huracán Performante ★★★★½	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★½	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★½	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-
Temerario ★★★★☆	17.12.25	Road-racer spirit infuses an outrageous technical tour de force.	2.5	1.8	1905	24.8	6

LAND ROVER

Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★½	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★½	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★½☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★½	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★½	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★½	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★½☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★½	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★½☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★½☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★½☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★½☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★½	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★½☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija ★★★★☆	30.7.25	Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122

MASERATI

Grecale Trofeo ★★★½☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★½☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★½☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★½☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★½☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★½☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★½	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

720S ★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S ★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Artura Spider ★★★★½ 6.11.24
Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.
3.1 2.2 1618 27.2 17

GT ★★★½☆ 27.1.21
Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.
3.3 2.3 1580 34.2

MERCEDES-AMG

A45 S 4Matic+ Plus ★★★★½ 4.3.20
AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.
4.1 3.3 1661 41.5 -

C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate ★★★☆☆ 31.7.24
Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.
3.3 2.8 2217 27.1 7.1

CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 20.8.25
Appealing GT leaves something on the table.
3.9 3.5 2012 26.9 -

GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé ★★★★½ 13.3.19
AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.
3.3 2.7 2135 30.1 -

GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé ★★★½☆ 21.6.23
Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.
2.9 2.5 2339 23.9 6

EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition ★★★★☆ 8.6.22
Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.
3.6 2.8 2673 - 259

S63 E Performance Night Edition ★★★★☆ 2.10.24
Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.
3.5 2.7 2666 26.1 -

GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 14.10.20
Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.
5.4 4.9 2471 29.4 -

SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 26.7.23
Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.
3.5 2.8 1939 26.2 -

GT 43 Premium Coupé ★★★★☆ 3.9.25
Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.
4.5 3.7 - 36.6 -

GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé ★★★½☆ 14.8.24
Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.
3.1 2.7 1972 30.7 -

MERCEDES-BENZ

A200 AMG Line Executive ★★★★☆ 24.5.23
Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.
7.8 7.3 1396 59.3 -

A250e AMG Line Premium ★★★☆☆ 5.8.20
Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.
6.7 5.4 1665 57.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

B180 Sport ★★★★☆ 3.4.19
In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.
8.4 8.3 1405 51.3 -

C300e AMG Line ★★★★½ 4.5.22
Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.
5.8 5.1 2005 49.0 48

E220d AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 3.1.24
An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.
7.2 5.9 1917 65.8 -

E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus ★★★★½ 19.3.25
Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.
4.9 4.3 2167 46.1 -

EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 4.1.23
Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.
6.0 5.5 2386 - 262

EQS 450+ Business Class ★★★★☆ 7.5.25
Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.
5.9 4.9 2608 2.6 248

EQS 450 Business Class SUV ★★★½☆ 6.3.24
Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.
5.5 5.2 2899 - 265

S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive ★★★★½ 6.4.22
Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.
5.2 4.2 2530 37.0 45

EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★☆☆ 17.11.21
Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.
8.4 7.6 2030 - 200

GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 16.9.20
Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.
7.4 7.1 1810 55.4 -

EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 18.5.22
A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.
7.7 6.8 2235 - -

GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★½☆ 13.9.23
Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.
6.5 6.0 1929 41.2 -

GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium ★★★½☆ 12.2.20
Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.
6.5 6.0 2634 38.2 -

G350d AMG Line ★★★★☆ 17.7.19
Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.
7.5 7.2 2451 31.3 -

G500 AMG Line Premium Plus ★★★★☆ 25.9.24
Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.
5.1 4.5 - 30.7 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

G580 with EQ Technology ★★★½☆ 17.9.25
Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.
4.5 3.9 3140 1.6 209

CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé ★★★★☆ 13.11.24
Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.
6.1 5.5 2122 37.1 49

MG

3 Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★½☆ 12.6.24
No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.
6.8 6.2 1311 47.9 -

4 EV Long Range SE ★★★★☆ 5.4.23
Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.
7.1 6.1 1692 - 185

S5 EV Long Range Trophy ★★★★☆ 23.7.25
It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.
6.0 5.1 1723 3.3 217

ZS Hybrid+ Trophy ★★★☆☆ 22.1.25
Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.
7.6 6.6 1422 41.5 -

IM6 100 Long Range ★★★½☆ 29.10.25
Exceptional mixed with bland and irritating.
5.5 4.0 2340 3.0 299

MINI

John Cooper Works ★★★★☆ 14.5.25
A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.
5.8 4.5 1363 42.0 -

Countryman C Exclusive ★★★½☆ 17.4.24
Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.
8.7 7.7 1618 46.9 -

Aceman SE Exclusive ★★★½☆ 8.1.25
Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.
6.8 5.7 1756 3.1 162

MORGAN

Plus Four ★★★½☆ 12.8.20
Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.
5.1 4.3 1013 54.0 -

Supersport ★★★★☆ 6.8.25
Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.
3.8 3.1 1180 44.2 -

Super 3 ★★★★½ 9.11.22
Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.
6.9 5.9 644 43.5 -

NISSAN

Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna ★★★½☆ 29.1.20
Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.
11.9 11.8 1256 46.0 -

Qashqai E-Power Tekna+ ★★★★☆ 8.10.25
Hybrid SUV takes big strides, not least on real-world efficiency.
7.6 6.1 1681 48.8 -

Ariya 87kWh Evolve ★★★½☆ 26.10.22
Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.
8.2 6.4 2109 - -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna ★★★★☆ 22.2.23
Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.
6.6 6.0 1947 33.8 -

OMODA

5 1.6 TGDI Comfort ★★½☆☆ 20.11.24
Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.
7.4 6.3 1474 38.2 -

PEUGEOT

e-208 Allure Premium ★★★★☆ 6.5.20
Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV.
- - 1455 - -

208 1.2 100PS Style ★★★☆☆ 5.11.25
Stylish and efficient, but could be more memorable to drive – and ergonomic.
10.4 10.4 1122 51.3 -

308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT ★★★★☆ 25.5.22
A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.
9.5 9.2 1358 55.3 -

408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8 ★★★★☆ 11.10.23
Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.
8.2 7.3 1746 42.1 40

508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto ★★★★☆ 24.10.18
Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.
8.8 8.5 1671 52.0 -

TOP 3

BEST PICK-UP TRUCKS

1 Ford Ranger

2 Ineos Grenadier Quartermaster

3 Toyota Hilux

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235
4 Long Range Single Motor	★★★☆☆	24.9.25	Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.	6.8	5.5	2246	2.5	310

TOP 3

BEST SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A110

2 Porsche 911

3 Mazda MX-5

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

PORSCHE

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	3.9.25	Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.	3.0	2.5	1600	34.5	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★½	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Electric	★★★★☆	13.8.25	Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.	5.2	4.2	2262	3.0	219
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★½☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

RENAULT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic	★★★★☆	16.7.25	Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.	8.2	7.5	1493	3.3	182
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★½	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge	★★★★½	25.6.25	Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Shows rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★½	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive	★★★★☆	27.8.25	Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.	5.7	4.3	1903	3.2	315
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland Hybrid GS	★★★½☆	27.8.25	Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.	9.8	9.3	1623	52.2	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
ID 7 GTX Tourer	★★★☆☆	13.8.25	Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.	5.3	4.6	2353	2.9	241
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 T8 Ultra	★★★½☆	15.10.25	Volvo's crowd pleaser is still classy and spacious, though far from cutting edge.	4.6	4.1	2145	34.3	40
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★½☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
EX90 Twin Motor AWD Ultra	★★★½☆	26.11.25	Made of the right stuff. Needs improved range and charging to justify its price.	5.6	4.7	2770	2.2	278
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Cupra Raval Summer 2026
Sporty electric supermini will be brand's smallest model, topped by 223bhp VZ.

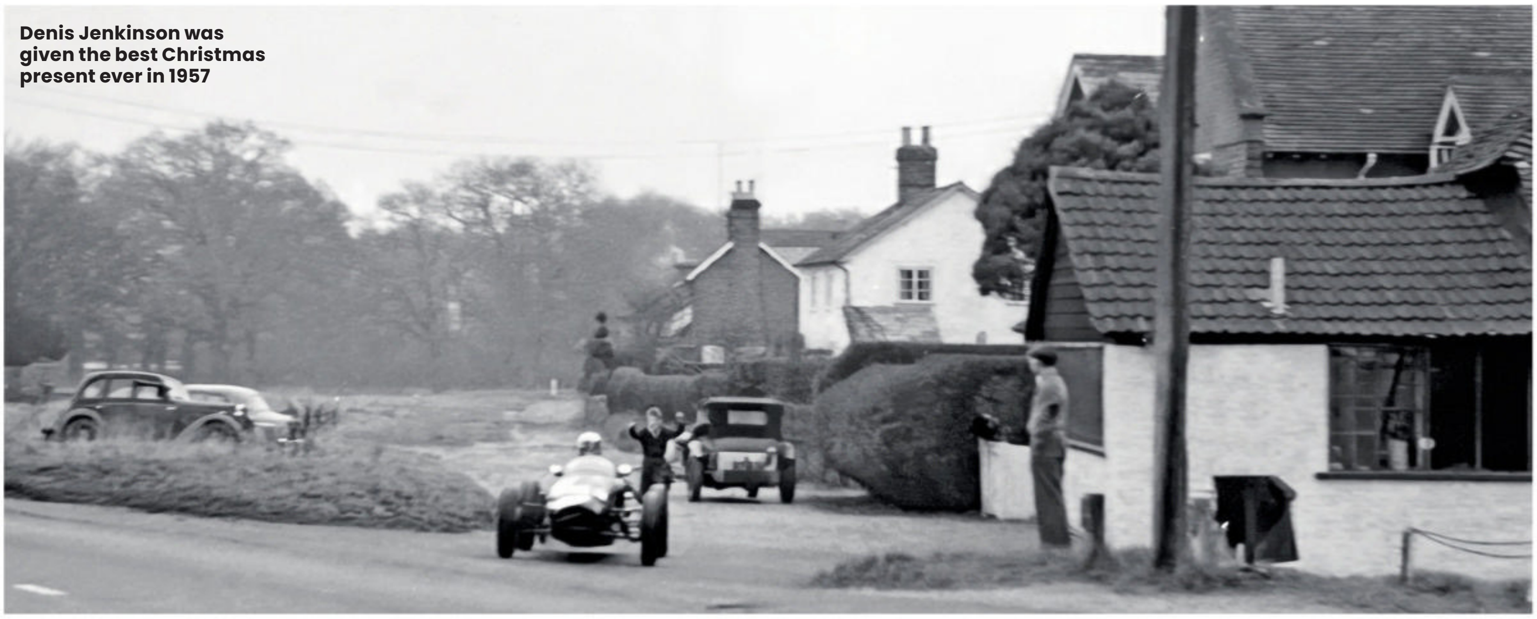
VW Golf Hybrid Late 2026
New T-Roc's Prius-style petrol-electric powertrain will find its way into family hatchback.

AUTOCAR IMAGE

Ford Bronco 2027
New Volkswagen Tiguan rival is inspired by US-market off-roader and twinned with Kuga.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
A CHRISTMAS DAY DRIVE

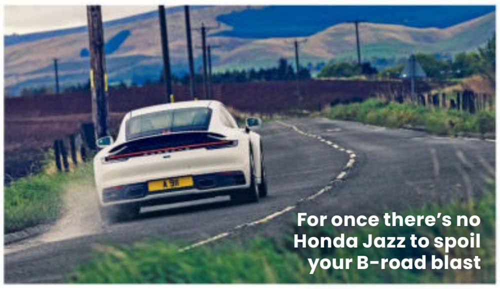


Denis Jenkinson was given the best Christmas present ever in 1957

BY JAMES ATTWOOD

On Christmas Day, 1957, Denis Jenkinson, a correspondent for Autocar's one-time sister publication Motorsport, set off for a quiet country drive from The Phoenix Inn in Hartley Wintney. Nothing too unusual about that, until you learn that the resulting loop of Hampshire was conducted in a Lotus 12 single-seater, as raced by Graham Hill in Formula 2 events that year.

The car had been delivered on a trailer attached to a Ford Consul, driven from Hethel to Hampshire by Lotus chief Colin Chapman – and Jenkinson claimed to have topped 120mph somewhere just outside of Basingstoke before a driveshaft failure ended his jaunt some 30 miles into a planned 180-mile circuit.



For once there's no Honda Jazz to spoil your B-road blast

> **"The roads are so peaceful and people seem to be a bit nicer"**

Technically there weren't any speed limits back then but, even considering that and the pretence of a trade plate carried by Jenkinson, the whole exercise was of course hugely and blatantly illegal. But Jenkinson pulled it off without attracting undue attention, in part because it was Christmas Day, so there were few motorists on the road and hardly any police to be seen.

Okay, I'm not suggesting you should wheel out a single-seater race car for a pre-turkey blast (although if anyone wants to drop off an F1 car at a hostelry near me, I'm game), but there is a genuine, rare joy to driving on 25 December. Not the days around it, when the roads are clogged with last-minute shoppers and frazzled holiday travellers, but on Christmas Day itself there's generally a rare tranquillity to proceedings.

The key is that there are fewer people on the road and virtually no commercial vehicles; there's simply more space and less pressure. And generally motorists show some form of festive spirit; it's the season of goodwill, and for one day people seem to be a bit nicer, leaving more room and generally behaving better.

But the real joy is that the roads are so peaceful. With so many people gathered round pulling crackers and toasting on eggnog, it's possible to have some road to yourself, whether to push on a bit or just to relax and cruise. Heck, even if you're making a long trip to have a tedious lunch with those boorish relatives you spend the rest of the year trying to avoid, the roads are deserted enough that you can take your time getting there and at least enjoy the serenity before chaos is unleashed.

Of course, driving in 2025 is a different ball game than in the 1950s: ANPR speed cameras don't take a day off to open their stockings, nor are potholes magically filled in with lumps of coal. But with a bit of care, and especially if the weather is nice, a quiet drive on Christmas Day can be one of the most pleasurable things you can do over the festive season.

What we did this week

LIGHT CHAT

I met Peugeot CEO Alain Favey at Stellantis UK's Coventry HQ and spoke to him for so long that he almost missed his flight home. But there was just enough time for him to switch on the Christmas lights in the lobby, using the new e-308 as a power source. Beats a local panto star.
FELIX PAGE

¡MAS DESPACIO!

Cupra closed a section of the old C15 B-road west of Barcelona for the press launch of the Leon VZ (review coming soon). Without any familiarisation, I had to follow touring car ace Jordi Gené down it at close to Tarmac rally pace. The car did okay; the driver is still wondering how he didn't come a cropper.
MATT SAUNDERS

MOULD GOLD

My test route for the new Fiat 500 Hybrid ended at the FCA Heritage Hub on the outskirts of Turin. It's well worth a visit, with hundreds of fascinating old gems from Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Lancia and Abarth. My favourite artefact was this pre-production example of the 2007 500, displayed next to a matching clay model.
CHARLIE MARTIN

4 PINTS
THE NIGHT
BEFORE

One in five drink drive prosecutions happen the morning after[A], many unaware they still have alcohol left in their system from the night before. AlcoSense quickly and accurately tells you your blood alcohol level, so you don't become one of them.

The Telegraph

"a fresh level of accuracy in consumer breath testing"[B]

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THE NEW
SEAT IBIZA
2510 NFI
Rollin' Young
Get £2,000 SEAT Contribution** at 6.9% APR Representative* with Solutions PCP.

Model shown not to UK spec. Liminal Red exterior paint shown available Q2 2026. *18s+. Subject to status. Ordered by 31 March 2026 from participating Retailers. Indemnities may be required. Subject to changes in vehicle or equipment prices. May be varied or withdrawn at any time. Freepost SEAT Financial Services. **Can consist of a contribution towards the Retail Cash Price and a contribution towards the deposit (please speak to a SEAT retailer for details). Official fuel consumption for the SEAT Ibiza range mpg (litres/100km) combined: 48.7 (5.8) – 56.5 (5.0). Combined CO_2 emissions 131 - 115 (g/km). Figures shown are for comparability purposes; only compare fuel consumption and CO_2 figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and vehicle load. Data correct at 12/2025.